

The Expository Writings of C. H. Mackintosh

VOLUME 1

Genesis to Malachi

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” – 2 Tim 3:16

The Expository Writings of C. H. Mackintosh

VOLUME 1

by



C. H. Mackintosh

Genesis to Malachi

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” – 2 Tim 3:16

Selected expository writings of C. H. Mackintosh

Compiled and Published in Three Volumes by

Grace-eBooks.com

In The Public Domain

Contents

Genesis 1	
The Divine Titles.....	9
Genesis 3	
Grace and Government.....	15
Genesis 12.	
The Call of God — Abraham and Lot.....	22
Genesis 14.....	31
Genesis 15.....	36
Genesis 16 - 17.....	41
Genesis 18 - 19.....	45
Genesis 20 - 21.....	52
Genesis 22.....	58
Genesis 22: 1-12	
DEVOTEDNESS: WHAT IS IT?.....	63
Genesis 29	
The History of the Tribe of Levi.....	86
Genesis 32:24-32	
Jacob Alone With God.....	128
Genesis 35.	
Restoration.....	133
Exodus 5: 1	
Jehovah's Demand and Satan's Objections.....	149
Exodus 12:13	
The True Ground of Peace.....	165
Exodus 12.	
The Passover in Egypt.....	170
Exodus 20:8-11	
The Sabbath, the Law, and the Christian Ministry.....	177
Exodus 20: 24-26	
THE TWO ALTARS.....	196
Exodus 21: 1-6; John 13: 1-10; Luke 12: 37	
The Ministry of Christ Past, Present, and Future.....	202
Exodus 26: 4	
“LOOPS OF BLUE”	224
Leviticus 6: 14-18	
THE PRIEST'S PLACE AND PORTION.....	226
Leviticus 10:1-11	

False Worship.....	230
Leviticus 24 and Ephesians 4:4	
Unity: What is it? And am I confessing it?.....	236
Numbers 13	
THE GRAPES OF ESHCOL.....	257
Numbers 13	
THE GRAPES OF ESHCOL.....	265
Deuteronomy 8: 1-9	
FOUR POINTS OF KNOWLEDGE.....	273
Deuteronomy 19:14	
Landmarks and Stumblingblocks.....	276
Deuteronomy 20:1-9	
PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY.....	283
Deut. 21:18-21, Luke 15:11-32	
Law and grace Exemplified.....	289
Joshua 1: 9	
STABILITY AND PEACE.....	297
Joshua 5	
"Gilgal.".....	301
Joshua 6 — Joshua 7	
Jericho and Achor — Privilege and Responsibility.....	331
Judges 6-8	
Gideon and his companions.....	356
1 Samuel 4 and 7	
God's Fulness for an Empty Vessel.....	393
1 Samuel 16	
The Life and Times of David — <i>the life of faith</i>	400
Introduction.....	400
1 Samuel 16 - Part 1 - DAVID ANOINTED.....	419
1 Samuel 17:2 - Part 2 - THE VALLEY OF ELAH.....	425
1 Samuel 22-23 - Part 3 - THE CAVE OF ADULLAM.....	442
1 Samuel 30 - Part 5 - ZIKLAG.....	465
2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13 - Part 6 - THE RETURN OF THE ARK.....	479
2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 29 - Part 7 - DAVID'S HOUSE AND THE HOUSE OF GOD.....	490
2 Samuel 11 - Part 8 - THE CONSPIRACY.....	503
2 Samuel 22 - Part 9 - THE SONG AND LAST WORDS.....	520
1 Samuel 18: 1-4	
JONATHAN.....	530
2 Sam. 12: 16, 2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 28: 2	
DAVID'S THREE ATTITUDES.....	532

2 Samuel 23	
"THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM"	540
2 Samuel 23	
DAVID'S LAST WORDS.....	542
2 Samuel 23; Romans 16	
David's Companions and Paul's Friends.....	545
1 Kings 16	
The Life and Times of Elijah.....	549
Introduction.....	549
Part 1 - THE PROPHET'S FIRST MESSAGE.....	551
Part 2 - THE PROPHET IN RETIREMENT.....	559
Part 3 - THE HOUSE OF AHAB.....	578
Part 4 - THE PROPHET ON MOUNT CARMEL.....	584
Part 5 - THE PROPHET ON MOUNT HOREB.....	598
Part 6 - THE PROPHET'S RAPTURE.....	614
CONCLUSION.....	627
2 Chronicles 4	
THE BRAZEN SEA.....	646
2 Chronicles 17	
Jehoshaphat — Worldliness.....	651
2 Chronicles 20	
The Living God and a Living Faith.....	672
2 Chronicles 29 - 32 and Isaiah 36 - 39	
Work in its Right Place;.....	690
2 Chronicles 30: 18-20	
The Remnant — Past and Present.....	724
2 Chronicles 34 - 35	
The Life and Times of Josiah.....	745
Esther 6	
A SLEEPLESS NIGHT.....	798
Job	
Job and His Friends.....	802
Job 28; Luke 11:34-36	
God's Way, and how to find it.....	845
Psalms 39: 7	
"WHAT WAIT I FOR?"	854
Psalms 67	
Israel and the Nations.....	858
Psalms 93; 1 Corinthians 3: 16; 1 Corinthians 6: 19	
"There is one body".....	862
Psalms 93:5	
The Discipline of the Assembly.....	867

Psalm 133	
"The dew of Hermon"	873
Isaiah 6: 1-8	
The Throne and the Altar.....	876
Jeremiah 15: 19	
SEPARATION: NOT FUSION.....	884
Amos 5:4, 5	
Communion with God: <i>What is it?</i>	888
Zechariah 9:12	
The Prisoner of Hope.....	893
Malachi, Jude	
THE CLOSING SCENES OF MALACHI AND JUDE.....	901

Genesis 1

The Divine Titles.

It is at once interesting, instructive, and edifying to mark the various titles under which God appears in the Holy Scriptures. These titles are expressive of certain characters and relationships in which God has been pleased to reveal Himself to man; and we are persuaded that the Christian reader will find solid profit and real spiritual refreshment and blessing in the study of this subject. We can do little more in this brief paper than offer a suggestion or two, leaving the reader to search the Scriptures for himself, in order to obtain a full understanding of the true meaning and proper application of the various titles.

In the first chapter of Genesis we have the first great title — "God" (Elohim): "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This presents God in unapproachable, incomprehensible Deity. "No man hath seen God at any time." We hear His voice and see His work in creation; but Himself no man hath seen or can see. He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.

But in Genesis 2, we have another title added to God, namely, "Lord" (Jehovah). Why is this? Because man is now on the scene, and "Lord" is expressive of the divine relation with man. Precious truth! It is impossible to read these two chapters and not be struck with the difference of the titles "God" and "the Lord God" — "Elohim" and "Jehovah Elohim"; and the difference is at once beautiful and instructive.

[We shall here give the various divine titles given in Scripture: and the reader can, if so led, examine for himself the passages in which they occur, and see the way in which they are applied.

"Elohim" — God. "Jehovah" — Lord. "Adonai," also rendered Lord, see Ps. 16: 2. Adonai, or Adon, has been taken to mean Ruler, or Sovereign, from the root "Dan," to judge. In some English Bibles, Jehovah is rendered in capital letters, LORD; Adonai, Lord. Thus the distinction is easily seen. "O my soul, thou hast said, Jehovah,

Thou art my Adonai" (Ps. 16: 2). This is very striking and most beautiful.

Then, in Gen. 14: 22, we have "Elion" — the Most High God. This is His millennial title. And in chapter 17: 1 we have Shaddai — the Almighty. "I am the Almighty God: walk before Me, and be thou perfect." In Psalm 91: 1-2, we have a very beautiful application: "He that dwelleth in the secret places of Elion shall abide under the shadow of Shaddai. I will say of Jehovah He is my refuge and my fortress; my Elohim; in Him will I trust." All this is full of precious instruction; and we trust the reader may be led to pursue the study for himself. It is hardly needful to add that, for the ineffable title and relationship of "Father" we must turn to the New Testament.]

Gen. 7: 16 presents an interesting example. "And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the *Lord* shut him in." God, in His government, was about to destroy the human race, and every living thing. But Jehovah, in infinite grace, shut Noah in. Mark the distinction. If a mere man were writing the history, he might transpose the titles, not seeing what was involved. Not so the Holy Spirit. He brings out the lovely point of Jehovah's relationship with Noah. Elohim was going to judge the world; but as Jehovah He had His eye upon His beloved servant Noah, and graciously sheltered him in the vessel of mercy. How perfect is Scripture! How edifying and refreshing to trace the moral glories of the divine volume!

Let us turn to a passage in 1 Sam. 17, where we have the record of David's encounter with Goliath. He boldly tells the giant what he is about to do, both to him and to the host of the Philistines, in order "that all *the earth* may know that there is a *God* (Elohim) in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the *Lord* (Jehovah) saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is Jehovah's, and He will give you into our hands" (vers. 46-47).

"All the earth" was to know and own the presence of God in the midst of His people. They could know nothing of the precious relationship involved in the title "Jehovah." This latter was for the assembly of Israel alone. They were to know not only His presence

in their midst, but His blessed mode of acting. To the world He was Elohim, to His beloved people He was Jehovah.

Well may these exquisite touches command our hearts' admiration. Oh, the living depths, the moral glories, of that peerless Revelation which our Father has graciously penned for our comfort and edification! We must confess it gives us unspeakable delight to dwell on these things and point them out to the reader, in this infidel day when the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture is boldly called in question, in quarters where we should least expect it. But we have something better to do just now than replying to the contemptible assaults of infidelity. We are thoroughly persuaded that the most effective safeguard against all such assaults is to have the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly, in all its living, formative power. To the heart thus filled and fortified, the most plausible and powerful arguments of all infidel writers are but as the pattering of rain on the window.

We shall give the reader only one more illustration of our subject from the Old Testament. It occurs in the interesting history of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 18: 31) And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the *Lord* (Jehovah) helped *him*; and *God* (Elohim) moved *them* to depart from him."

This is deeply affecting. Jehoshaphat had put himself into an utterly false position. He had linked himself with the most ungodly of Israel's kings. He had even gone so far as to say to the wicked Ahab, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war." No marvel, therefore, if the Syrian captains mistook him for Ahab. It was only taking him at his word. But when brought down to the very lowest point — into the very shadow of death — "he cried out"; and that cry went up to the gracious and ever-attentive ear of Jehovah, who had said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee." Precious grace!

But mark the lovely accuracy in the use and application of the divine titles — for this is our thesis. "He cried out, and Jehovah helped him;" and — what then? A mere human author would

doubtless have put it thus: "Jehovah helped him, and moved them." But no; Jehovah had, as such, nothing to do with uncircumcised Syrians. His eye was upon his dear, though erring, servant; His heart was toward him, and His everlasting arms around him. There was no link between Jehovah and the Syrians; but Elohim, whom they knew not, moved them away.

Who can fail to see the beauty and perfection of all this? Is it not plain that the stamp of a divine hand is visible upon the three passages which we have culled for consideration? Yes, and so it is upon every clause, from cover to cover, of the divine volume. Let no one suppose for a moment that we want to occupy our readers with curious points, nice distinctions, or learned criticisms. Nothing is further from our thoughts. We would not pen a line for any or all of these objects. As God is our witness, our one great object in writing this paper is to deepen in the hearts of our readers the sense of the preciousness, beauty and excellency of the Holy Scriptures, given of God for the guidance help and blessing of His people in this dark world. If this object be gained, we have our full reward.

But we cannot close without referring, for a moment, to the precious pages of the New Testament — We shall ask the reader to turn to Rom. 15, in which we have God presented to us under three distinct titles, each one of which is in perfect and beautiful keeping with the immediate subject in hand. Thus, in the opening verses of the chapter, which properly belong to Rom. 14, the inspired apostle is urging upon us the necessity of patience, forbearance, and kindly consideration one of another.

And to whom does he direct us for power to respond to those holy and much-needed exhortations? "To the God of patience and consolation." He presents God in the very character in which we need Him. Our small stock of patience would soon be exhausted in seeking to meet the varied characters which cross our path, even in intercourse with our brethren. There are constant claims upon our patience and forbearance; and most surely others have need of patience and forbearance with us. Where are we all to get the means of meeting all these claims? At the exhaustless treasury of "the God of patience and consolation." Our tiny springs would soon dry up if not kept in unbroken connection with that ever-flowing Fountain.

The weight of a feather would be an overmatch for our patience; how much more the ten thousand things that come before us even in the Church of God!

Hence the need of the beautiful prayer of the apostle, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

Here lies the grand secret, the divine power of receiving one another, and going on together in holy love, heavenly patience, and tender consideration. We cannot get on otherwise. It is only by habitual communion with the God of patience and consolation that we shall be able to rise above the numberless hindrances to confidence and fellowship that continually present themselves, and walk in fervent love to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

But we must draw this paper to a close, and shall merely glance at the other divine titles presented in our chapter. When the apostle speaks of the future glory, his heart at once turns to God in the very character suited to the subject before him. "Now *the God of hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." If we would have the hope of glory heightened in our souls — and truly we need it — we must turn our eyes to "the God of hope."

How marked and striking is the application of the divine titles, wherever we turn! Whatever may be the character of our need, God presents Himself to our hearts in the very way adapted to meet it. Thus, at the close of the chapter, when the apostle turns his eyes towards Judea, and the difficulties and the dangers awaiting him, his heart springs up to *the God of peace*." Precious resource in all our varied exercises, anxieties, sorrows, and cares!

In a word, whatever we want, we have just to turn in simple faith to God, and find it all in Him. God — blessed forever be His name — is the one grand and all-sufficient answer to our every

need, from the starting-point to the goal of our Christian career. Oh for artless faith to use Him!

Genesis 3

Grace and Government.

This title may possibly present a theme to which some of our readers have not given much of their attention; and yet few themes are more important. Indeed, we believe that the difficulty felt in expounding many passages of Holy Scripture, and in interpreting many acts of divine providence, is justly traceable to a want of clearness as to the vast difference between God in grace and in government. Now, as it is our constant aim to meet the actual need of our readers, we purpose, in dependence upon the Spirit's teaching, to unfold a few of the leading passages of Scripture in which the distinction between grace and government is fully and clearly presented.

In the third chapter of the book of Genesis we shall find our first illustration — the first exhibition of divine grace and divine government. Here, we find man a sinner — a ruined, guilty, naked sinner. But here, too, we find God in grace, to remedy the ruin. to cleanse the guilt, to clothe the nakedness. All this He does in His own way. He silences the serpent, and consigns him to eternal ignominy. He establishes His own eternal glory, and provides both life and righteousness for the sinner — all through the bruised Seed of the woman.

Now, this was grace — unqualified grace — free, unconditional, perfect grace — the grace of God. The Lord God gives His Son to be, as "the Seed of the woman," bruised for man's redemption — to be slain to furnish a robe of divine righteousness for a naked sinner. This, I repeat, was grace of the most unmistakable nature. But then, be it carefully noted, that in immediate connection with this first grand display of grace, we have the first solemn act of divine government. It was grace that clothed the man. It was government that drove him out of Eden. "Unto Adam also, and to his wife, did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." Here we have an act of purest grace. But then we read: "So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

Here we have a solemn, soul-subduing act of government. The coat of skin was the sweet pledge of grace. The flaming sword was the solemn ensign of government. Adam was the subject of both. When he looked at the coat, he could think of divine grace — how God provided a robe to cover his nakedness; when he looked at the sword, he was reminded of divine, unflinching government.

Hence, therefore, the "coat" and the "sword" [The "sword" is the ensign of divine government; the cherubim are the invariable companions thereof. Both symbols are frequently used throughout the Word of God.] may be regarded as the earliest expression of "grace" and "government." True, these things appear before us in new forms as we pass down along the current of inspiration. Grace shines in brighter beams, and government clothes itself in robes of deeper solemnity. Moreover, both grace and government assume an aspect less enigmatic, as they develop themselves in connection with the personal history of the people of God from age to age; but still it is deeply interesting to find these grand realities so distinctly presented under the early figures of the coat and the sword.

The reader may perhaps feel disposed to ask, "How was it that the Lord God drove out the man, if He had previously forgiven him?" The same question may be asked in connection with every scene, throughout the entire book of God and throughout the entire history of the people of God, in which the combined action of grace and government is exemplified. Grace forgives; but the wheels of government roll on in all their terrible majesty. Adam was perfectly forgiven, but his sin produced its own results. The guilt of his conscience was removed, but not the "sweat of his brow." He went out pardoned and clothed; but it was into the midst of "thorns and thistles" he went. He could feed in secret on the precious fruits of grace, while he recognised in public the solemn and unavoidable enactments of government.

Thus it was with Adam; thus it has been ever since; and thus it is at this moment. We should seek to get a clear understanding of this subject in the light of Scripture. It is well worthy of prayerful attention. It too frequently happens that grace and government are confounded, and, as a necessary consequence, grace is robbed of its charms, and government is shorn of its solemn dignities: the full and

unqualified forgiveness of sins, which the sinner might enjoy on the ground of free grace, is rarely apprehended, because the heart is occupied with the stern enactments of government.

The two things are as distinct as any two things can be; and this distinctness is as clearly maintained in the third chapter of Genesis as in any other section of the inspired volume. Did the "thorns and thistles" with which Adam found himself surrounded on his expulsion from Eden interfere with that full forgiveness of which grace had previously assured him? Clearly not. His heart had been gladdened by the bright beams of the lamp of promise, and his person clothed in the robe which grace had fashioned for him ere he was sent forth into a cursed and groaning earth, there to toil and struggle by the just decree of the throne of government. God's government "drove out the man"; but not until God's grace had pardoned and clothed him. That sent him forth into a world of gloom; but not until this had placed in his hand the lamp of promise to cheer him through the gloom. He could bear the solemn decree of government in proportion as he experienced the rich provision of grace.

Thus much as to Adam's history in so far as it illustrates our thesis. We shall now pass on to the ark and deluge, in the days of Noah, which, like the coat of skin and the flaming sword, exemplify in a striking way divine grace and divine government.

The inspired narrative of Cain and his posterity presents, in lines of unflinching faithfulness, the progress of *man* in his fallen condition; while the history of Abel and his immediate line unfolds to us, in glowing contrast, the progress of those who were called to live a life of faith in the midst of that scene into which the enactments of the throne of government had driven our first parents. The former pursued with headlong speed the downward course until their consummated guilt brought down the heavy judgement of the throne of government. The latter, on the contrary, pursued, through grace, an upward course, and were safely borne, through the judgement, into a restored earth.

Now, it is interesting to see that, before ever the governmental act of judgement proceeded, the elect family, and all with them,

were safely shut in the ark, the vessel of grace. Noah, safe in the ark, like Adam clad in the coat, was the witness of Jehovah's unqualified grace; and, as such, he could contemplate the throne of government, as it poured its appalling judgement upon a defiled world. God in grace saved Noah, ere God in government swept the earth with the besom of judgement. It is grace and government over again. That, acts in salvation; this, in judgement. God is seen in both. Every atom of the ark bore the sweet impress of grace; every wave of the deluge reflected the solemn decree of government.

We shall just select one case more from the book of Genesis — a deeply practical one — one in which the combined action of grace and government is seen in a very solemn and impressive way. I allude to the case of the patriarch Jacob. The entire history of this instructive man presents a series of events illustrative of our theme. I shall merely refer to the one case of his deceiving his father for the purpose of supplanting his brother. The sovereign grace of God had, long before Jacob was born, secured to him a pre-eminence of which no man could ever deprive him; but, not satisfied to wait for God's time and way, he set about managing matters for himself.

What was the result? His entire after-life furnishes the admonitory reply. Exile from his father's house; twenty years of hard servitude; his wages changed ten times; never permitted to see his mother again; fear of being murdered by his injured brother; dishonour cast upon his family; terror of his life from the Shechemites; deceived by his ten sons; plunged into deep sorrow by the supposed death of his favourite Joseph; apprehension of death by famine; and, finally, death in a strange land.

Reader, what a lesson is here! Jacob was a subject of grace — sovereign, changeless, eternal grace. This is a settled point. But then, he was a subject of government likewise; and be it well remembered that no exercise of grace can ever interfere with the onward movement of the wheels of government. That movement is resistless. Easier would it be to stem the ocean's rising tide with a feather, or to check the whirlwind with a spider's web, than to stay by any power, angelic, human, or diabolical, the mighty movement of Jehovah's governmental chariot.

All this is deeply solemn. Grace pardons; yes, freely, fully and eternally pardons; but what is sown must be reaped. A man may be sent by his master to sow a field with wheat, and through ignorance, dullness, or gross inattention, he sows some noxious weed. His master hears of the mistake, and, in the exercise of his grace, he pardons it — pardons it freely and fully. What then? Will the gracious pardon change the nature of the crop? Assuredly not; and hence, in due time, when golden ears should cover the field, the servant sees it covered with noxious weeds. Does the sight of the weeds make him doubt his master's grace? By no means. As the master's grace did not alter the nature of the crop, neither does the nature of the crop alter the master's grace and pardon flowing therefrom. The two things are perfectly distinct; nor would the principle be infringed even though the master were, by the application of extraordinary skill, to extract from the weed a drug more valuable than the wheat itself. It would still hold good that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

This will illustrate, in a feeble way, the difference between grace and government. The passage just quoted from the sixth of Galatians is a brief but most comprehensive statement of the great governmental principle — principle of the gravest and most practical nature — a principle of the widest application. "Whatsoever *a man* soweth." It matters not who he is: as is your sowing, so will be your reaping. Grace pardons; nay, more, it may make you higher and happier than ever; but if you sow weeds in spring, you will not reap wheat in harvest. This is as plain as it is practical. It is illustrated and enforced both by Scripture and experience.

Look at the case of Moses. He spoke unadvisedly with his lips at the waters of Meribah (Num. 20). What was the result? Jehovah's governmental decree prohibited his entrance into the promised land. But be it noted, while the decree of the throne kept him out of Canaan, the boundless grace of God brought him up to Pisgah (Deut. 34), where he saw the land, not as it was taken by the hand of Israel, but as it had been given by the covenant of Jehovah. And what then? Jehovah buried His dear servant! What grace shines in this!

Truly, if the spirit is overawed by the solemn decree of the throne at Meribah, the heart is enraptured by the matchless grace on the top of Pisgah. Jehovah's government kept Moses out of Canaan. Jehovah's grace dug a grave for Moses in the plains of Moab. Was there ever such a burial? May we not say that the grace that dug the grave of Moses is only outshone by the grace that occupied the grave of Christ? Yes; Jehovah can dig a grave or make a coat; and, moreover, the grace that shines in these marvellous acts is only enhanced by being looked at in connection with the solemn enactments of the throne of government.

But again: look at David "in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Here we have a most striking exhibition of grace and government. In an evil hour David fell from his holy elevation. Under the blinding power of lust, he rushed into a deep and horrible pit of moral pollution. There, in that deep pit, the arrow of conviction reached his conscience, and drew forth from his broken heart those penitential accents, "I have sinned against the Lord." How were those accents met? By the clear and ready response of that free grace in which our God ever delights: "The Lord hath put away thy sin." This was absolute grace. David's sin was perfectly forgiven. There can be no question as to this. But whilst the soothing accents of grace fell on David's ears upon the confession of his guilt, the solemn movement of the wheels of government was heard in the distance. No sooner had mercy's tender hand removed the guilt, than "the sword" was drawn from the scabbard to execute the necessary judgement. This is deeply solemnising. David was fully pardoned, but Absalom rose in rebellion.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The sin of sowing weeds may be forgiven, but the reaping must be according to the sowing. The former is grace, the latter is government. Each acts in its own sphere, and neither interferes with the other. The lustre of the grace and the dignity of the government are both divine. David was permitted to tread the courts of the sanctuary as a subject of grace (2 Sam. 12: 20) ere he was called to climb the rugged sides of mount Olivet as a subject of government (2 Sam. 15: 30); and we may safely assert that David's heart never had a deeper sense of

divine grace than at the very time in which he was experiencing the righteous action of divine government.

Sufficient has now been said to open to the reader a subject which he can easily pursue for himself. The Scriptures are full of it; and human life illustrates it every day. How often do we see men in the fullest enjoyment of grace, knowing the pardon of all their sins, walking in unclouded communion with God, and all the while suffering in body or estate the consequences of past follies and excesses. Here, again, you have grace and government. This is a deeply important and practical subject; it will be found to aid the soul very effectively in its study, not only of the page of inspiration, but also of the page of human biography.

A passage which is often erroneously adduced as an exhibition of grace is entirely an exhibition of government: "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. 34: 6-7). Were we to regard this passage as a presentation of God in the gospel, we should have a very limited view indeed of what the gospel is. The gospel speaketh on this wise: "God was in Christ, *reconciling* the world unto Himself, *not imputing* their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5: 19). "Visiting iniquity" and "not imputing" it are two totally different things. The former is God in government; the latter is God in grace. It is the same God, but a different manifestation.

Genesis 12.

The Call of God — Abraham and Lot.

In a day of such widely extended profession as the present, it is specially important that Christians should be deeply impressed with the necessity of realising personally the call of God, without which there can be no permanence or steadiness in the Christian course.

It is a comparatively easy thing to make a profession at a time when profession prevails; but it is never easy to walk by faith — it is never easy to give up present things, in the hope of "good things to come." Nothing but that mighty principle which the Apostle denominates "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11: 1), can ever enable a man to persevere in a course which in a world where all is wrong — all out of order, must be thorny and difficult. We must feel "persuaded" of something yet to come — something worth waiting for — something that will reward all the toil of a pilgrim's protracted course, ere we rise up out of the circumstances of nature and the world, to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12: 1).

All this is fully exemplified in Abraham, and the exemplification receives additional force from the contrast exhibited in the character of Lot and others who are introduced in the course of the narrative.

In Acts 7, we have the following words which bear directly upon the subject before us. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he lived in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and come into the land that I shall show thee" (vers. 12). Here then we are presented with the first dawning of that light which attracted Abraham out of the darkness of "Ur, of the Chaldees," and which shining in upon his wearisome path, from time to time, gave fresh vigour to his soul, as he journeyed in quest of "that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "The God of glory" caused Abraham to see, in the light of His character, the true

condition of things in Ur, and further, to believe, as some one has observed, *a report concerning future glory and inheritance*, and he therefore hesitates not, but instantly girds himself up for the journey.

However, upon a close comparison of the opening of Acts 7 with Genesis 12: 1, we get an important principle. From the time that God appeared unto Abraham, until he finally gets up into the land of Canaan, an event occurs involving much deep instruction to us. I allude to the death of Abraham's father, as we read in Acts 7, "From thence, *when his father* was dead, He removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell" (ver. 4). This will enable us to understand the force of the expression in Gen. 12, "The Lord *had* said unto Abram" etc. (ver. 1). From both these passages, it would plainly appear the movement made by Terah and his family, recorded in Gen. 10: 31, was the result of a revelation made by "the God of glory" to Abram, but it would not appear that *Terah* had received any such revelation from God. He is presented to us rather as a hindrance to Abram than any thing else, for until he died, Abram did not come into the land of Canaan — his divinely appointed destination.

Now, this circumstance, trivial as it may seem to a cursory reader, confirms in the strongest manner the statement already advanced, namely, that unless the call of God — the revelation from "the God of glory" be *personally realised*, there can be no permanence or steadiness in the Christian course. Had Terah realised that call, he would neither have been a clog to Abram in his path of faith, nor yet would he have dropped off, like a mere child of nature, ere reaching the future land of promise. We get the same principle illustrated in Laban afterward in Gen. 24. Laban, as some one has well observed, was fully alive to the value of the gold and silver jewels which the servant of Abraham had brought with him, but he had not heart to value *the report* concerning future things, which dropped from his lips. In other words, he did not receive a revelation from "the God of glory," and as a consequence, he remained, as the same writer has observed, "*a thorough man of the world.*"

In the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we are taught the same truth. There were other persons with him when he was struck to the

ground by the lustre of the glory of the Lord Jesus; these persons "saw indeed the light" — they witnessed many of the external circumstances which had arrested the furious zealot; but as he himself states, "*they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me*" (Acts 22: 9). Here is the grand point. The voice must speak "*to me*" — "the God of glory" must appear "*to me,*" ere I can take the place of a pilgrim and stranger in the world, and perseveringly, "run the race that is set before me." It is not *national faith*, nor *family faith*, but *personal faith* that will constitute us real witnesses for God in the world.

But when Abram was released from the clog which he had experienced in the person of his father, he was enabled to enter with vigour and decision upon the path of faith — a path which "flesh and blood" can never tread — a thorny path beset with difficulties from first to last, in which God alone can sustain the soul. "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. *And the Canaanite was then in the land.* And the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land: *and there builded he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him*" (Gen. 12: 6-7). Here Abram at once takes his stand as a *worshiper*, in the face of "the Canaanite." The altar marks him as one who, having been delivered from the idols of Ur of the Chaldees, had been taught to bow before the altar of the one true God, "who made heaven and earth." In the following verse, we get the second grand feature in the character of the man of faith, namely, "*the tent,*" denoting strangership in the world. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a *strange country, dwelling in tabernacles* with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise"(Heb. 11: 9).

We shall have occasion to notice more fully, as we proceed, these two important points in the life of Abraham, and shall therefore rest satisfied for the present with establishing the fact that the tent and the altar do most clearly present him to us as a *stranger* and a *worshiper*, and that as such, he was a man entirely separated from the course of this evil world.

Scarcely had Abram entered upon his course, when he had to encounter one of those difficulties which have a special tendency to

test the genuineness of faith both as to its quality and its object. "And there was a famine in the land." The difficulty meets him in the very place into which the Lord had called him. Now, it is no easy matter when we perceive trial and sorrow, privation and difficulty awaiting us, while walking in "the strait and narrow way," still to persevere — still to pursue the onward path, and especially if we observe within our reach, as Abram did, an entire exemption from the particular trial under which we may be smarting. The men of this world "are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued as other men." This feeling is still further increased by the entire absence of every thing, as far as sight is concerned which could act as a confirmation of our hope. Abram had not so much as to set his foot upon — famine was raging around him on every side, *save in Egypt*. Could he only find himself *there*, he would be able to live in ease and abundance.

Here, however, the man of faith must pursue the path of simple obedience. God had said, "Get thee out of thy country unto a land that I will show thee." Abram may, it is true, afterward discover that obedience to this command will involve his abiding in a land where nothing but starvation, apparently, awaits him. But even though it should be so, God had not in any way qualified the command — No, the word was simple and definite: "Into a land that *I* will show thee." This should have been as true and as binding upon Abram when famine reigned around him, as when peace and abundance prevailed. Famine should not, therefore, have induced him to leave the land, neither should abundance have induced him to remain. The influential words were, "I will show thee."

But Abram leaves this land — he succumbs, for the moment, to the heavy trial, and bends his footsteps down to Egypt, leaving behind him his tent and altar. There he obtained ease and luxury; he escaped, no doubt, the formidable trial under which he had suffered in the land of promise; but he lost, for the time being, his worship and strangership — things which should ever be dearest to the heart of a pilgrim.

There is nothing in Egypt for Abram to feed upon as a spiritual man; it might, and doubtless did, afford abundance for him as a natural man, but that was all. Egypt would give nothing to Abram

unless he sacrificed his character both as a stranger and as a worshiper of God. It is needless to observe that it is exactly so at this very hour. There is plenty in the world upon which our old nature could feed most luxuriously. There are the rich delights "of the flesh and of the mind," and abundant means of gratifying the desires of the heart, but what of all these, if the enjoyment thereof leads, as it must necessarily do, right out of the path of faith — the path of simple obedience.

Here then is the question for the Christian: which shall I have, the gold and silver, the flocks and herds — the present ease and affluence of Egypt, or the tent and altar of "the land of promise"? Which shall I have: the carnal ease and delight of the world, or a peaceful holy walk with God *here*, and eternal blessedness and glory hereafter? We cannot have both, for, "If *any man* love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

But, we may ask, why was it that Abram had to experience famine and trial in the land of promise? Why did he not find a home and plenty there? Simply because "the Canaanite and Perizzite dwelt then in the land" (Gen. 13: 7). The land had not as yet been fitted up to be the residence of God's redeemed ones. Abram's faith might have enabled him to penetrate through the long and dreary period which should intervene ere the promise could be consummated; but that very principle of faith it was that made him "a pilgrim and a stranger." He could wait for God's time, and until then remain without "so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7: 5). So should it be now. The true man of faith cannot find a home in the earth because "the Canaanite" is there. By and by it will not be so, for, "all that offends" will be gathered out of the kingdom, and the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. (Rev 11: 15) and then righteousness shall prevail "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

Genesis 13

This beautiful chapter shows us the man of faith recovering himself, through the faithfulness and loving-kindness of God, who never allows such to wander far, or tarry long away. The gold and silver, the flocks and herds of Egypt, could not long prove a

satisfying portion for Abram, while deprived of his tent and his altar, and he therefore once more, in the renewed energy of faith rises, as it were, from the dust of Egypt, and retraces his steps to the land of promise. Happy recovery! Certain evidence of a fixed and honest purpose to serve the Lord. "The ship may be tossed by the waves and the winds, *but the magnet still points to the north.*"

But some expressions in the opening of this chapter confirm most fully a thought already expressed, namely, that Abram gained nothing, "as before God," by his visit to Egypt. Thus, for example, "Abram went on his journeys . . . unto the place where his tent had been *at the beginning*, unto the place of the altar which he had made there *at the first*" (vers 3-4). The words "beginning," and "at the first," prove that Abram had made no progress while in Egypt, but that, while there, all his time was, as it were, lost. No doubt he learnt a wholesome lesson, and it is well when by our failures, we learn to distrust our own hearts, and dread the pernicious influence of the world. Abram learnt that there could be no tent or altar in Egypt. It is only faith that can enable a man to raise an altar or erect a tent, but in Egypt all is sight and not faith, and hence, the moment Abram set his foot there he ceased to show forth the genuine fruits of faith — yea, the very principle which led him to leave the land of promise. Led him, at the same time, to relinquish his character as a stranger and a worshiper.

How forcibly are we here reminded of a proposal made long after this, by a king of Egypt, to Abraham's seed. "And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said: Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land" (Ex. 8: 25). Thus, it would seem ever to have been the design of the enemy to get the people of God, the holy seed, to defile themselves by worshipping or sacrificing to God, *in the world*; i.e., to make their character, as worshipers of God, accord with that of men of the world — men holding a place in society where Christ is an outcast; thus, of course, declaring that there is no difference between the religion of the world and the religion of God — a truly fearful delusion, calculated to lead many souls out of the way of truth and holiness.

It is most sad to hear, at times, those who surely ought to know better, in order, as they say, to manifest *a liberal spirit*,

speaking of the religion of the world in all its multiplied forms, as if it were all right; or, as if it were a matter of total indifference whether we remained in communion with error or not. Oh, let us not be deceived! God's principle of separation is as strong and as binding today as it was in the days of Abram or Moses. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing," must hold good as long as the "unclean thing" exists; nor can any outward form alter the character — the true essential character of "the unclean thing" so as to make it "a clean thing."

Moses, then, was not liberal, in the above acceptation of the word, for he at once refused to countenance the religion of the world. "It is not meet so to do." Memorable words! Would that there were more amongst us who, when invited to countenance the religion of the world, would reply, "It is not meet so to do." Abram could not worship in Egypt, neither could his seed.

But Abram had more difficulties than one to encounter in his course. The path which every man of faith is called to tread lies between two dangerous extremes. One is the temptation to return to the world; the other, to strive with brethren by the way. Abram had just recovered himself from the effects of the former, and we have now to behold him buffeting the latter.

The moment Abram emerged from Egypt, he appeared in a special manner to move under a new responsibility, namely, responsibility to his brother to walk with him in harmony. While in Egypt, this responsibility stood quite in the shade. The institutions — laws — habits — luxury and ease of Egypt, would in an eminent degree tend to do away with every such feeling. All these things would have had the effect of erecting barriers around each individual tending to prevent him from recognising the fact that he was his "brother's keeper." Nor is it otherwise now. So long as we continue in the world — the religious world, as it is termed — we shall find ourselves completely relieved from the difficult task of being our "brother's keeper." Those who advocate a continuance therein may deny this fact, but it is all in vain, for Scripture and experience alike demonstrate it. Abram and Lot *did not strive in Egypt*, and a religious establishment presents this attraction at least — and it is by no means a feeble one — it effectually prevents

brotherly collision and, of course, where there is no collision there can be no strife — no dispute; where collision takes place, there must be either grace to enable us to walk in unity of mind, or strife and contention. But Egypt saps the very springs of grace by leading us out of a place of simple dependence upon the Lord, (for dependence ever genders grace and forbearance) and because she does so, she, at the same time, teaches us, or attempts at least to teach us, that we do not need grace, by leading us into a sphere in which responsibility to brethren is never realised; thus the need is not felt; weakness is mistaken for strength, folly for wisdom.

When the Christian at first starts on his course, he fondly dreams of nothing but perfection in his fellow Christians; but in this he soon finds himself mistaken, for we have all our infirmities, and as the apostle states, "In many things we offend all." But why, we may ask, was there such a speedy development of infirmity upon their coming up out of Egypt? Because they were now called to walk in the power of a naked principle, without any of the props or barriers of Egypt. They were called to walk by faith, and "faith worketh by love."

Now "the Canaanite," etc., "was then in the land." This should have acted as a hindrance to any strife between "*brethren*," for the Canaanite cannot understand anything about the infirmities of believers, and he therefore puts all their failure down to some defect in the principle professed.

But in every strife between brethren, there must be fault somewhere. In the contention between Paul and Barnabas there was fault somewhere. Nor can we be at any loss to decide where it lay. Barnabas wished to take *his relative* with him, but this relative had before proved himself unfit, or at least unwilling, to "endure hardness," therefore it could not have been with a single eye to the Lord's work that Barnabas desired his company. The Lord Himself, too, at once takes Paul's side of the question by providing him with a dear son and fellow-labourer, in the person of Timothy, with whom he had "none like-minded."

So it is exactly in the case before us. We can have no hesitation in asserting that Lot was the man in error here. Lot does

not appear to have fully got rid of the spirit of the world, and where there is this spirit predominating in any one he will ever find the path of faith too strait for him to walk in, and so it was, "They could not dwell together."

If, then, it be asked on what grounds one would pronounce Lot to have been in the wrong? The answer is, first, Lot's subsequent conduct; and, secondly, the Lords dealings with Abram, "after that Lot was separated from him."

What then did Lot do? "*He lifted up his eyes.*" This is ever our mode of acting when not under the direct power of faith. Whenever we lift up our eyes without divine direction, we are sure to go wrong. I say, without divine direction, for we find the Lord afterwards directing Abram to lift up his eyes, but then that was totally different from Lot's act, which was simply the suggestion of mere human wisdom and foresight. Human wisdom and foresight, however, can never assist our progress as men of faith — no, quite the reverse; human wisdom will ever suggest things which, if acted upon, will lead us right athwart the path of a man of faith. Therefore Lot, in lifting up his eyes, could not penetrate beyond the "things that are seen and temporal." Such was the utmost bound of his range of vision. The things on which his eyes rested were those with which he had been conversant while in Egypt, as we read, "He beheld all the plain of Jordan that it was well watered everywhere . . . *like the land of Egypt*" (ver. 10). Here we observe that Lot had never been really detached in heart and affection from Egypt — he had never learnt the vanity and unsatisfactoriness of all her resources in the light of a better order of things — he had never contrasted her with that "*city which hath foundations*, whose builder and maker is God" — in a word, he "having put his hand to the plough," was now beginning "to look back," and thus to prove himself "unfit for the kingdom of heaven."

There is a striking notice of all this afforded in the opening verse of this chapter, "Abram went up out of Egypt and *Lot with him.*" Here we get the secret of Lot's after instability. He appears to have gone up rather *with Abram* than *with God*, and the consequence was that, when he parted with Abram, he had nothing to lean upon. He had been hitherto moving under Abram's protection and

guidance instead of being directly before the Lord, and therefore when he lost Abram he went astray.

Now then is the moment for Abram to "lift up his eyes," at the Lord's command, and oh, what a different range of vision was his! While Lot could not penetrate beyond the narrow limits of the present scene, Abram was enabled to survey the length and breadth of God's inheritance. He soars on the strong and rapid pinion of faith, and is, as it were, lost in the unbounded beneficence of God; while Lot, the man walking by sight, is well-nigh lost in the deep gulf of Sodom's corruption.

Let us then, ere we enter upon the next chapter, take a view of the different circumstances of these two men who had started together. "Lot lifted up his eyes," and the prospect on which they rested was, as might be expected, such as suited his natural desires, "well-watered plains," which, however fair in man's view, were nevertheless, in the sight of the Lord, filled with exceeding wickedness (cp. vers. 10 and 14). Abram, on the contrary, had allowed his eye to wander over the length and breadth of the *promised* inheritance — uninfluenced by all else, he viewed the portion which God was *reserving* for him and his seed, and took up his position accordingly.

Thus do we find Lot in the unhallowed region of Sodom; and Abram — the pilgrim and stranger, with his tent and altar — "in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron."

Genesis 14

Here we have a very minute account of a battle fought by "four kings with five," and we may ask, What connection had this strife between "the potsherd of the earth," with the history of the people of God? With Abram indeed none, in one sense, for he was outside it all. *His tent* marked him as a stranger to all these things — it marked him as one to whom the battle of "four kings with five" would be a matter of very trivial moment. And then his altar marked him as one whose pursuits were quite of another character, even a heavenly. His tent showed him to be a stranger on earth — his altar showed him to be at home in Heaven. Happy man! Happy pilgrim!

who could thus from his high elevation, even the lofty watch-tower of faith, look down, as a passer-by, upon the battle fields of an evil world. It mattered not to Abram whether the laurel of victory were about to wreath the brow of the king of Sodom, or of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam; his portion was not in danger through their strife, because he had it in that place "where thieves do not break through and steal."

But, though it was the happy lot of Abram to have his being and his portion in a place where wars could have no influence, yet such was not the case with his more worldly-minded brother. His position was such as to place him in the midst of the strife, and consequently the issue of this battle could not fail to be of the deepest moment to him. If the child of God will stoop so low as to mix himself up with the world, he must calculate upon being made a participator in its convulsions, and woe be to that man who shall have his portion in the world in that day (now fast approaching) when all things shall be shaken by the mighty hand of God in judgement.

I would here observe that what has ever made the history of nations and the movements of mighty kings and conquerors, matters of interest to the Holy Spirit, has been the connection of such things with the history of the people of God. Beyond this they possessed nothing of moment to Him. He could find no pleasure in dwelling upon the abstract history of man. The busy strife and tumult of nations — the fierce contests of ungodly tyrants grasping after power — the movements of armies, could not attract the notice of the Spirit of peace; nevertheless, when such things became, in the least degree, connected with the history of a "righteous soul," the Holy Ghost can be most minute in detailing the circumstances of a battle, as is observable in the case under consideration.

What then were the results of this contest to Lot? Ruin to him and his family. He was made prisoner and all his goods were taken (ver. 12). He had laid up treasure for himself upon earth, and the thieves had broken through; and thus, while Abram was above it all, in the power — the separating power of communion with God, he found himself a prisoner and a beggar. He had sown to the flesh, and of the flesh he must now "reap corruption."

But this was just the moment for Abram to show himself in the powerful activities of love. He had, as above observed, hitherto surveyed with calm indifference these movements of "kings and their armies," but the very same faith which had made him indifferent about the strifes of men, made him quick to take cognisance of a *brother* in distress. Faith not only purifies the heart from worldly and carnal desires, but it also "works by love," as is powerfully shown in Abram's case, for "when Abram saw that his brother was taken captive he armed his trained servants," etc. (ver. 14).

Now, it is to be observed that it is in the hour of distress and difficulty that the relationship of brother gets the prominent place. In days of unruffled peace, Lot might be known to Abram as "his brother's son," but now he was in sorrow, and therefore the claims of brotherhood act, and act powerfully and effectually. True he had contended about a piece of land — he had turned aside from his venerable companion, and had taken up his abode at Sodom, but what of that? He was now in trouble, and therefore all is forgotten, but the fact that they were brethren.

We are now called to witness a deeply interesting scene. Abram himself is about to meet a temptation — a temptation at once repulsed indeed by the power of God in him, but nevertheless, a temptation. The king of Sodom was about to come forth to display his treasures before the eye of Abram, and he had by nature a heart to value those treasures.

That man knows not his own heart who could say that the world does not present many — very many attractions to the natural heart. There is a species of misanthropy which looks like elevation above the world, but which, after all, is not it. The cynic philosopher Diogenes, when he told Alexander to get out of his sunshine, was as proud and as worldly a man as Alexander himself. The only true and real way in which to be separated from, and elevated above, the world, is by the knowledge of heavenly things, and Abram was led, through the mercy of God, into that knowledge.

But the victory obtained by Abram, was not owing to any power in himself. He had, as I have observed, a heart to value the

things which the enemy had to give him; and, therefore, if he triumphed, it was through the operation of a power outside himself. In all this transaction, the One who had watched over His dear servant during the dark season of his sojourn in Egypt, and who, moreover, had, by that very sojourn, taught him a lesson as to the true character of the world, was now closely observing his ways, and making preparations for his relief; He was cognisant of the movements and designs of the enemy, from first to last, and He therefore prepares to supply a heavenly antidote to nullify his poison.

It is particularly worthy of observation that between the time at which the king of Sodom went forth to meet Abram, and that wherein he made the proposal to him with reference to "the persons and the goods," there is a remarkable character introduced, namely, Melchizedek. This stranger, commissioned by God, was on his way to fortify Abram's heart at the very moment when the enemy was on his way to attack (cp. ver. 17, 18, and 21). Now, why did not "the priest of the Most High God" come to meet Abram before? Because this was the very moment in which Abram most needed the strength which he had to bring. The enemy was about to display his gilded bait before the eye of the man of God, and therefore is Melchizedek at hand to display in his view the divine realities of the kingdom. He was about to feed and strengthen his soul with the "bread," and cheer him with the "wine," of the kingdom, in order that, "in the strength of that meat" he might mount above the influence of all the allurements of the world. From all this we may learn that it is communion with the joys and glories of the kingdom that can alone cause the heart to reject the pollutions of the world.

Reader, upon what are you now feeding? What constitutes your habitual food? Is it "the bread and wine" which the Lord provides, or "the goods" of Sodom? Are your ears open to the pernicious suggestions of the *King of Sodom*, or to the heavenly communications of the *King of Salem*? The Lord grant that our hearts may ever choose that in which He delights.

But to proceed, Melchizedek leads Abram's soul into present communion with "THE MOST HIGH GOD, THE POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH," and thus completes the wondrous

contrast between "the King of Sodom" and "the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth" — "the goods of Sodom" and the extensive possessions of Heaven and earth. Blessed contrast, which faith ever draws! It is needless to say that Abram at once rejects the offer of the King of Sodom. The bread and wine, and the benediction of "the priest of the Most High God," had raised Abram to such a height that he could, in one comprehensive glance, take in the vast possessions of Heaven and earth, and further, look down from thence upon the despicable proposal of the King of Sodom and reject it. Melchizedek had just said, "the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth," and Abram had laid hold on these words and made use of them in his reply to the adversary. "I have lifted up my hand," said he, "to the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (vers. 22-23).

Abram appears to breathe the very atmosphere of the presence of Him "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, in whose sight the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold! he taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted to Him as less than nothing and vanity" (Isa. 40: 12, 15-18).

And surely, we may say, it was only thus that Abram could triumph; and let no one who moves not, in some measure, in the same sphere, affect to despise the world — nothing can be more truly vain. There must be the experimental acquaintance with the better thing — the fondly cherished hope of "*good things to come*" — ere we can obtain full victory over present things, and our own worldly desires. "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, *knowing in yourselves* that ye have *in heaven a better and an enduring substance*" (Heb. 10: 34). If we are really waiting for the manifestation of the glory, we shall be found standing apart from everything which will be judged in that day: and it is written, "Yet

once more, I shake not the earth only but also heaven; and this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12: 26-27).

We have, in the last verse of our truly interesting chapter, a happy feature in the character of the true man of faith. Abram would not force others to walk according to his elevated standard. Although *he* might be able to reject, in the most unreserved manner, the offers of the king of Sodom, yet *others* might not be able to do so, and therefore he says, with regard to "Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, *let them take their portion.*" Our walk should ever be "according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12: 3). We have seen, in our own day, many persons led, at the outset, to give up a variety of worldly things, and afterwards plunge still deeper into those things; and why? Because they acted through mere excitement or human influence, and were not able to say with Abram, "*I have lift up my hand unto the Lord.*"

Genesis 15

In the opening verse of this chapter, we have a principle fraught with comfort and encouragement to us — a principle eminently calculated to call out into full exercise a spirit of true devotedness to the Lord. We observe here, the Lord's grace in acknowledging and accepting the sacrifice laid upon His altar — the willing offering of the devoted heart of His servant. Our God is never slow in owning such things, nor in rewarding them a hundredfold. Abram had just been manifesting a spirit of self-denial in refusing the attractive offers of the King of Sodom. He had refused to be enriched from such a source, and had taken "the Most High God" for his portion and his reward, therefore the Lord comes forth to confirm the soul of his servant with these words, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." "God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love" (Heb. 6: 10). A similar principle is presented to us in Genesis 13, where Abram is seen giving way to Lot, in the matter of choosing the land. Abram's whole anxiety in that matter was about the Lord's honour, as maintained in the harmonious walk of "*brethren*" before the "Canaanite and the

Perizzite." "Let there be no strife," says he, "between me and thee . . . *for we be brethren.*" Nor did Abram desire to suppress the strife, by *exacting concessions* from Lot. No; he was willing to concede everything himself — to surrender every claim — to sacrifice every advantage, provided the strife were suppressed. "Is not the *whole land* before thee?" *Take* what you please — possess yourself of the fairest spot in all the region round about. Here, as some one has observed, is the liberality — the unselfishness of faith. What was land to Abram in comparison with the Lord's glory? Nothing. He could give up anything, or everything, for that. How then does the Lord meet this self-sacrifice on the part of His servant? Just as He does in this chapter 15, by coming in, in the plenitude of His goodness, to make it up to him a hundredfold. "Lift up *now* thine eyes . . . for *all the land which thou seest* to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 13: 14-15). How truly gracious it is of the Lord to enable His servant to make a sacrifice for Him, and then reward that sacrifice by a vast increase of blessing. Such are His ways — His ever adorable ways.

We are now called to trace in Abram the development of a feature which, in a special manner, demonstrates the high order of his communion with God. After all God's revelations and promises to him, his soul still breathes after an object without which all besides was defective. True, he had surveyed, with the eye of faith, the promised inheritance. — the magnificent gift of divine benevolence: yet, notwithstanding all this, was there a great desideratum mighty blank. He sighed for a Son. A son *alone* could render complete, in Abram's estimation, all his previous privileges. "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and *the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.* And Abram said, Behold to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, *one born in my house is mine heir*" (vers. 2-3). Now, we have, in tracing the path of this remarkable man, beheld him, at times, displaying some very noble features of character. His generosity — his high elevation of mind — his pilgrim-like habits — all these things denote a man of the very highest order; yet I hesitate not to say, that we find him, in the passage just quoted, exhibiting a temper of soul, more in harmony with the mind of Heaven than anything we have met hitherto. Abram desired to have his house enlivened by the cry

of a child. He had been long enough conversant with the spirit of bondage breathed by "the steward of his house," but the titles of *lord* and *master*, though all very good in their place, could not satisfy the heart of Abram, for Abram had been taught of God, and God ever instructs His children in those things which He loves, and which He exhibits in His dealings with them. And I would just observe, in connection with this, that we see in the case of the prodigal in Luke 15, the development of a principle very much in connection with what we have been saying. He says, in the very midst of all his misery "I will arise and go unto my Father, and will say unto him, *Father*." Here we have a fine feature in the character of this poor wanderer. He had such a sense of the grace of him against whom he had sinned, that he could yet say "*Father*," notwithstanding his long course of rebellion and folly.

But let us observe with what accuracy Abram lays hold of the great principle afterwards brought out by the Spirit in Romans 8. "*If children, then heirs*." Abram felt that *sonship* and *heirship* were inseparably connected, so much so, that without the former the latter could not be. This is the meaning of his question, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" Abram rightly judges that to have "*no seed*" was to have *no inheritance*, for the word is, not if *stewards or servants*, then heirs, but "*if children, then heirs*" (Rom. 8: 17).

How very important it is that we should ever bear in mind, that all our present privileges and future prospects stand connected with our character as "sons." It may be all well and very valuable, in its right place, to realise our responsibility to act as "faithful and wise stewards," in the absence of our Master; still the most ample privileges — the highest enjoyments — the brightest glories, which belong to us through the grace and mercy of our God, stand intimately connected with our character and place as "sons" (cp. John 1: 12; Rom. 8: 14, 19; 1 John 3: 1-2; Eph. 1: 5; Eph. 5: 1; Heb. 12: 5).

In the vision presented to us in the close of our chapter, and which was granted to Abram as an answer to his question, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" we have a further

illustration of the teaching of Romans 8. Abram is taught by the vision, that the *inheritance* was only to be reached through *suffering* — that the *heirs* must pass through *the furnace*, previous to their entering upon the enjoyment of that which God was reserving for them; and I doubt not that, were we more deeply and experimentally taught in the divine life, we should more fully apprehend the moral fitness of such training. Suffering then, is not connected, in this chapter, with sonship, but with heirship; and so we are taught in Romans 8. "If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that *we suffer* with Him, that we may be also *glorified* together." Again, we must, "through much *tribulation*, enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The Lord Jesus Himself, likewise, stands as the great illustration of the principle upon which we are dwelling. He occupied the place and enjoyed the favour of a Son from before all worlds (Prov. 8), yet ere He could lay His hand upon the inheritance He must pass through suffering. He had a baptism to be baptised with, and was straitened (*sunecomenos*) until it was accomplished. So I also when He remembered that "a corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die," or else abide *alone*, His soul was "*troubled*." I Now, we are to "know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings," before we can know Him in the fellowship of His glory; hence it is that ; the palmed multitude mentioned in Revelation 7 had to pass through "great tribulation" (*tes megales thlipseos*) ere they reached their peaceful, heavenly home. Passages of Scripture might be multiplied in proof of this point, but I will merely refer to the following, viz. — Phil. 1: 29; 1 Thess. 3: 4; 2 Thess. 1: 5; 1 Tim. 4: 10; 2 Tim. 2: 12; 1 Peter 5: 10.

But, in this remarkable vision, there are two points which, as they appear prominently in the whole of Israel's after history, deserve to be particularly noticed. I allude to "the smoking furnace, and the burning lamp" (ver. 17). It has been well observed, by a recent writer, that Israel's history might be summed up in these two words, "the furnace and the lamp." Egypt was a trying furnace to the seed of Abraham. There the fire burned fiercely, but it was soon followed by "the burning lamp" of God's own deliverance. The cry of the suffering seed had come up into the ears of Jehovah. He had heard their groanings and seen their afflictions, and had come down

to display above their heads "the lamp" of salvation. "I am come down to deliver them," said He to Moses. Satan might take delight in kindling the furnace, and in adding to its intensity, but the blessed God, on the other hand, ever delighted in letting the rays of His lamp fall upon the dark path of His suffering heirs. So, when Jehovah had, in the faithfulness of His love, brought them into the land of Canaan, they again and again, kindled a furnace by their sins and iniquities; He, as frequently, raised up deliverers in the persons of the judges which were as so many lamps of deliverance to them. Further, when by their aggravated rebellion, they were plunged into the furnace kindled at Babylon, even there we observe the glimmerings of "the burning lamp," and finally it shone out for their full deliverance, in the decree of Cyrus.

Now, the Lord was constantly reminding the children of Israel of the above truth. He says to them, "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the *iron furnace*" (Deut. 4: 20; 1 Kings 8: 51). Again, "Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers, in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from *the iron furnace*" (Jer. 11: 3-4).

Finally, we may ask, are the seed of Abraham now suffering in the furnace, or are they enjoying the lamp of God? — for they must be experiencing either the one or the other — the furnace, assuredly. They are scattered over the face of the earth as a proverb and a byword, a reproach and a hissing among all the nations of the earth. Thus are they in the iron furnace. But, as it has ever been, "the burning lamp" will assuredly follow "the smoking furnace," for "all Israel shall be saved; as it is written there shall come out of Zion *the Deliverer* and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Isa. 59: 20; Rom. 11: 26).

Thus we see how that Israel's eventful history has all along stood connected with the smoking furnace and the burning lamp, here seen in vision by Abram. They are either presented to us in the furnace of affliction through their own sin, or enjoying the fruit - of God's salvation; and even at this moment when, as has been already observed, they are manifestly in the furnace, we can witness the fulfilment of God's promise, so often repeated, "And unto his son

will I give on tribe, that David My servant may have a *lamp* [margin] always before Me in Jerusalem the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there" (1 Kings 11: 36; 1 Kings 15: 14; 2 King 8: 19; Psalm 132: 17). If it be asked where does this lamp shine now? Not on earth, for Jerusalem, the place of its earthly display, "trodden down of the Gentiles," but the eye of faith can behold it shining with undimmed lustre "in the true tabernacle," where it will continue to shine "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in"; and then, when the furnace, seen in this chapter by Israel's great progenitor, shall have been heated to the very highest degree of intensity, when the blood of Israel's tribes shall flow like water round the walls of Jerusalem, even then, shall the blessed lamp come forth from the place where it now shines, and cast its cheering rays upon the dark path of the oppressed and sorrowing remnant, bringing to mind those oft-illustrated words, "O ISRAEL, THOU HAST DESTROYED THYSELF; BUT IN ME IS THY HELP."

{I would refer the reader to the following Scriptures in confirmation of what has been above advanced on the subject of "the lamp." — Ex. 27: 20; 2 Sam. 22: 29; Ps. 119: 105; Prov. 6: 23; Prov. 13: 9; Isaiah 62: 1}

Genesis 16 - 17

These two chapters give us an account of Abram's effort to obtain the promised seed by harkening to the voice of his wife, also of God's mode of teaching him the unprofitableness of such an appeal to the mere energy of nature as that which his effort involved.

At the very opening of Abram's course we find his faith put to the test in the matter of the famine, but here we find him tried in quite another way, a way moreover, which involved a far higher exercise of faith and spiritual power. "His own body now dead and the deadness of Sarah's womb;" although, in the main, "he considered them not," must have acted upon his mind to a considerable extent.

Now, as is the case of the famine already alluded to, Egypt was at hand, holding out a refuge from anxiety as to present supply, so here, "*an Egyptian maid*" — one of those maid-servants,

doubtless, which Abram had gotten during his sojourn in that evil place — was presented to him as a relief in the time of anxiety touching the promised seed. "*Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.*"

But why introduce the element of bondage into his house? Why did not Abram's mind shrink from the thought of "the bondwoman and her son" as much as it had shrunk from the thought of "the steward of his house"? Might not the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou give me," be asked in connection with one as well as the other? Surely it was as much opposed to the divine economy to grant the inheritance to the seed of "*a bond-woman,*" as to a "*servant.*" In either case it would be an allowance of the claims of nature, which cannot be.

The principles involved in this act of Abram's are fully laid open to us in the inspired commentary given in the Epistle to the Galatians. There we read, "Abram had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh — but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4: 22-26).

The churches of Galatia had been led away from the simplicity and liberty of Christ and had returned to "*the flesh.*" They were beginning to substitute religious ceremonies for the energies of the Spirit of Christ. Hence it is that the apostle, in the course of his reasoning with them on their unhappy movement, refers to the matter recorded in our chapters, and the way in which he expounds it to them renders it unnecessary to dwell longer upon it. This step of Abram's only "gendered to bondage;" it introduced an unhealthy and an unhappy element into his house which, as we shall see when we proceed further with our subject, he had to expel ere he could reach the highest point of elevation in his course.

In Genesis 17 we have God's remedy presented to us, and most consolatory it is to observe how the Blessed One at once comes in order to lead back His servant to the *simple yet difficult* position of faith in Himself — simple, because therein we have but one object with which to be occupied — difficult, because therein we have to contend against the workings of "an evil heart of unbelief," leading us to "depart from the living God."

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram and said unto him, I AM THE ALMIGHTY GOD, *walk before Me, and be thou perfect.*" Here was at once the effectual cure for all impatient anxiety. "*I am Almighty*" — I can quicken the dead — I can call those things that be not as though they were — I can, if needs be, raise up of stones, children unto you — no flesh shall glory in My presence. "I am Almighty, walk before Me and be thou perfect."

It is perhaps one of the finest principles with which the mind can be occupied, that our God desires that He may ever be learnt in the variety of His perfections, by the need of His people. We have already met a striking illustration of this important principle, in the matter of Abram's conflict with the king of Sodom, in Genesis 14. There, when Abram was tempted by the offers of the enemy, he found relief in the apprehension of God's character as "the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth." The character of the communion into which Melchizedek led the soul of Abram was suited to the circumstances in which he stood. So is it exactly in this 17th chapter. Communion with God as "the Almighty" was the sole remedy for impatient anxiety as to the fulfilment of any promise.

Now, when once the Lord exhibits Himself in His character of "Almighty," there can be no obstacle whatsoever to the outflow of His grace; for, when almighty power and almighty grace combine in behalf of the sinner, faith may count upon a rich and an abundant harvest.

The promises, therefore, with which this chapter abounds are just such as we might have expected. "I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between Me and thee and thy

seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17: 6-8). Surely these are promises which *almighty grace* alone could utter, *almighty power* alone fulfil.

The above promises stand connected with "the covenant of circumcision — which is specially important as looked at in connection with Abram's effort to obtain the seed otherwise than by the operations of God's own hand. It would be profitable to dwell for a little upon the doctrine of this covenant of circumcision but my design in taking up this history, is not by any means to handle it in a doctrinal way, but rather to draw from it some of those valuable principles of a decidedly practical tendency with which it so richly abounds; and therefore I pass rapidly over chapters 16 - 17, which contain a mine of precious doctrinal truth quite sufficient to occupy a separate treatise.

[I would observe here that the doctrine of the Epistle to Galatians stands intimately connected with Gen. 16 & Gen. 17. I might add, the important doctrine of Israel's future restoration. We also get the doctrine of justification by faith fully illustrated in Gen. 15.]

Ere closing my observations on this section of our narrative, I would add that it is *faith* alone which can enable one to listen, as Abraham here does, to the promises of Almighty God, and when faith listens, God will surely continue to speak. Abram here gets his name changed to Abraham, and the Lord unfolds to him the future greatness and number of his seed, while Abraham hearkens in the unquestioning silence of faith. But when the "Almighty God" goes on to say with reference to Sarai, "As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her" (vers. 15-16), he is at once overwhelmed by the pledges of such marvellous power and grace to be exercised towards him. They exceeded anything he had as yet known, and "Abraham fell on his face." This is very instructive. Abraham with his face in the dust,

overcome by the plenitude of almighty power and grace! Surely, we may say, while dwelling upon such a Scripture as this, it is only *faith* that can rightly entertain the "*Almighty God*," it alone can give Him His due and proper place and honour Him as He should be honoured. When the Almighty displays Himself, self must be excluded, hence we find that Abram is set aside in all this — Sarai is lost sight of — "*the bondwoman and her son*" are, for the moment put far out of view, and nothing is seen but "*the Almighty God*" in the sovereignty and fullness of His grace and power, and the faith that could lie prostrate in the dust, in silent adoration of such a display of the divine glories.

How different is this from the preceding chapter! There we find Abram hearkening to the suggestion of Sarai his wife, with regard to the bondwoman — here we find him hearkening to the voice of Jehovah, as Almighty, who is about to quicken the dead womb of Sarah, and to call those things that be not as though they were, that no flesh might glory in His presence. There it is Abram and Sarai *without God* — here it is *God without Abram and Sarai*. In a word, there it is *flesh* — here it is spirit — there it is sight — here it is *faith*. Wondrous contrast! Exactly similar to that afterwards displayed by the apostle to the churches of Galatia, when he sought to restore them from the sad influence of "*the beggarly elements*" of the flesh and the world, to the full liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.

Genesis 18 - 19

I class these two chapters together because, like those we have just been considering, they furnish us with a contrast — a contrast most marked and striking between the position occupied by Abraham in Genesis 18, and that occupied by Lot in Genesis 19.

The Lord Jesus when asked by Judas, not Iscariot, "How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" replied, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him" (John 14: 23). Again, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3: 20). Now,

Abraham furnishes us with an exceedingly happy exemplification of the Galatians stands intimately connected with Gen. 16 - 17, and n. We also get the doctrine of justification by faith fully illustrated truth stated in the above passages. "The Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and He sat in *the tent door* in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18: 1). Here we find Abraham again in the full exhibition of his stranger character. *Mamre and the tent* are associated in our minds with the day of his triumph over the king of Sodom. Abraham is still a stranger and a pilgrim "dwelling in tabernacles." The revelation made unto him by the Almighty God had not altered the tone of his character in this respect, but had rather imparted fresh vigour and energy thereto. A simple dependence upon the promise of the Almighty God was the most effectual means of maintaining him in his stranger condition.

Now, it is, in the very highest degree instructive to see the honour here put upon the character and condition of the stranger. Throughout the wide range of the world there was just *one spot* in which the Lord could accept the rites of hospitality and make Himself at home, and that was "*in the tent of a pilgrim and stranger.*" The Lord would not honour the sumptuous halls and princely palaces of Egypt with His presence. No. All His sympathies and all His affections hung around the stranger of Mamre, who was the only one who, in the midst of an evil world could be induced to take God for his portion.

What a season of enjoyment it must have been to Abraham while those heavenly strangers sat with him and partook of the offerings of his generous heart. Mark how he calls forth into action all the energies of his house to do honour to his guests. He hastens from the tent to the field, and from the field to the tent again, and seems to lose sight of himself in his effort to make others happy.

Nor is it merely by partaking of Abraham's hospitality that the Lord gives expression to the high estimation in which He holds him. He renews His promise to him with regard to the son — He opens up His counsels to him with reference to Sodom. "Shall I," says He "hide from Abraham that thing which I do seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? *For I know him*, that he will command

his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (vers. 17-19).

Here Abraham is seen as "*the friend of God.*" "The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth," but Abraham was made acquainted with what the Lord was about to do to Sodom, while Lot — the one who was so deeply interested in the solemn event — was left in profound ignorance about it.

How then does Abraham make use of his favoured position? Does he use it to strengthen more fully, and place on a firmer basis, the future interests of his house? Surely the natural heart would at once have prompted him to make such a use of his present advantage in the matter of nearness to Jehovah. Does he use it thus? Nay. Abraham had learnt too much of the ways of God to act in a way savouring so much of the selfishness of a heartless world. But, even had he thought of such a thing, he had no need to utter a syllable on the subject, for "*the Almighty God*" had most amply satisfied his heart with regard to the everlasting interests of his house — He had fixed it upon such a foundation that an anxious thought would have evidenced a complete want of moral order in Abraham's soul. He therefore entertained not a thought about himself or his house, but like a genuine man of faith, *he takes advantage of his place in the presence of God to intercede for a brother, whose worldliness had plunged him into the very midst of that place which was about to be given over to everlasting destruction.* "And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (ver. 23) "*The righteous!*" to whom can he allude? Can it be to the man who had so deliberately turned aside out of the path of faith to take up his abode at Sodom? Yes; he speaks of Lot — he calls him "*righteous*" — he speaks of him in the very same terms as the Spirit in the apostle afterward speaks of him when he calls him a "righteous soul." Abraham, therefore was taught of God when he could recognise in the man surrounded by all the pollution of Sodom "a righteous soul."

{Although I consider Lot the principal object in Abraham's mind while interceding before the Lord, I do not forget there is mention made of "fifty," etc.}

I doubt not it will be admitted by every one taught of God that the conduct of Abraham in this chapter, furnishes us with one of the most important results of a holy and separated walk. We observe in it a man pleading with God in a most urgent strain for one who had turned his back upon him, and selected Sodom as the place of his abode. How completely must Abraham's soul have been lifted above "the things that are seen" when he could thus forget "the strife" and the departure, worldliness and evil of Lot, and plead for him still as "a righteous soul." If Abraham appears as "the *friend* of God" under other circumstances and other scenes, surely he is here seen as the *child* of God exhibiting most sweetly those principles which he had learnt in communion with his heavenly Father.

We shall now leave Abraham, for a little, enjoying his happy place before the Lord, while we contemplate the last sad scene in the life of one who seems to have valued the things of this life more highly than was consistent with the character of "a stranger and pilgrim" or "a righteous soul." From the time that the separation took place between Abraham and Lot, the former seems to have proceeded "from strength to strength;" while the latter, on the contrary, seems to have proceeded only downwards, from one stage of weakness to another, until we find him, at the close, making shipwreck of everything, and merely "escaping with his life." The loss of all his goods in the battle between the "four kings and five" does not seem to have had any effect upon the mind of Lot in the way of teaching him the evil or being mixed up with the world; yea, he seem to have become more deeply involved in worldliness after that event than he had been before; for, at the first, he merely "pitches this tent towards Sodom" (Gen. 13: 12); but now we find him sitting "in the gate" (Gen. 19: 1), which, as we know, was then the place of honour. When once a man has put his hand to the plough if he begin to look back, we have been told by Him who cannot err, that "he is not *fit* for the kingdom of God." Nor is it possible to count upon the fearful lengths to which a man may go when once the world, in any one of its varied aspects, has taken

possession of his heart, or when once he has begun to turn his back upon the people of God. The terrible declension spoken of in Hebrews 10, which stops not short of "trampling under foot the Son of God," has its beginning in the apparently simple act of "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." How needful, therefore, it is that we should take heed to our ways, and watch the avenues of our hearts and minds, lest any evil thing should get dominion over us, which, however trivial in itself, might lead to the most appalling results.

Now, it strikes me, that we have in the circumstance presented to us in the opening of Genesis 19 the full evidence of Lot's fallen condition. The Lord Himself does not appear at all. He remains at a distance from the unholy place, and merely sends *His angels* to execute His commission upon the devoted city of Sodom. The angels, too, exhibit all the symptoms of distance and strangership — they refuse to go into Lot's house when invited, saying, "*Nay, but we will abide in the street all night.*" True, they subsequently enter into his house; but, if they do so, it is not so much to enjoy refreshment as to counteract the sad effects of Lot's wrong circumstances. How different was the scene at Lot's house from that which they had so lately witnessed at the tent of the stranger of Mamre! The tumult of the men of Sodom — to whom, notwithstanding all their ungodly deeds and ungodly speeches, Lot applies the title of "*brethren*" — the evident embarrassment of Lot at being discovered in such painful circumstances — the shocking proposal which he is constrained to make in order to screen his guests from the violence of the ungodly men of Sodom — the struggle at the door, and Lot's danger — all these things must have shocked the heavenly strangers, and stood in marked contrast with the holy peace and retirement of Abraham's tent, together with his own calm and dignified demeanour throughout the scene. Well might those angels have been astonished to find "a righteous soul" in such a place, when he could have enjoyed, in company with his separated brother, the peaceful and holy joys of his steady and consistent course.

But the time had now arrived for the pouring out of the cup of divine wrath upon Sodom. "The men said unto Lot, Hast thou here

any besides? . . . bring them out of *this place*: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it" (vers. 12-13). The critical moment which the Lord Jesus, in the gospel, notes by the exceedingly solemn word "UNTIL," was now at hand for the careless inhabitants of Sodom, who dreamed not of any interruption to their "eating, and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage." A moment's respite is allowed, during which Lot bears a message to his son-in-law, a testimony as to the rapidly approaching judgement; but, ah! what power could the testimony of one who had voluntarily come in and settled amongst them, have upon those who had lived and moved from their earliest infancy in the midst of the ungodly scene? How could Lot expect that his words would have any weight when his ways had so sadly contradicted them? He might now, with terrified aspect and earnest entreaties, urge them to leave a place which he knew was doomed to everlasting destruction, but they could not forget the calm and deliberate way in which he had at first "pitched his tent toward Sodom," and finally taken his seat "in the gate;" hence, as might be expected, "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law" (Gen. 19: 14). And how, so far as he was concerned, could it be otherwise? His sons-in-law might be, and doubtless were, responsible before God for the rejection of the testimony; but Lot could not, by any means, expect them to heed him much, indeed, we find that even he himself was tardy in departing from the place; for "*while he lingered*" — while his heart still went after some object or another that was dear to him — "the men *laid hold upon his hand*, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand's of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful to him, and they *brought him forth* and set him without the city" (Gen. 19: 16). From this statement, it is manifest that, had not the men "laid hold of, and brought forth" Lot, he would, no doubt, have "lingered" on "*until* the fire of God's judgement had fallen upon him, and prevented even his "escaping with his life." But they "pulled him out of the fire," because "the Lord had mercy upon him."

But this escape of Lot's only served to put fresh honour upon Abraham, for we read that "when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he *remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the*

overthrow" (ver. 29). Thus, as Abraham's sword had delivered Lot in the time of the conquest of Sodom, his prayer delivered him in the time of its final overthrow, "for the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Nor does the contrast between those two men stop here. There is yet another scene in which they stand at a great distance from each other as to the moral condition of their souls. "Abraham gat him up early in the morning, to the place where he stood before the Lord" (ver. 27). Here the man of faith, the holy pilgrim, once more raises his head amid the mighty scene of desolation. All was over with Sodom and its guilty inhabitants, "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." Sad spectacle! The din and bustle of that once stirring city was hushed; silence reigned around — the buying and selling — the eating and drinking — the marrying and giving in marriage — all the intercourse of social life had been awfully broken in upon. The solemn "UNTIL" had come at last — the only one in all that wicked place who, notwithstanding his failure, could be regarded as "the salt," had been removed — the measure of Sodom's iniquity had been filled up — the day of divine long-suffering closed, and nothing now met the eye of Abraham but misery and desolation throughout all the plain. How melancholy! And yet it was but a type of the far more terrible desolation which shall sweep across this guilty world when the Son of man makes His appearance, "when every eye shall see Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn and wail because of Him."

Thus, "Abraham stood *before the Lord*" completely exempt from all the sad effects of the recent visitation, as far as he was personally concerned. His stranger condition which, in the days of Chedorlaomer, had enabled him to live outside of Sodom and all its circumstances, still kept him free, and was the means of his escape from Sodom's unutterable woe and misery. Had Abraham, when solicited by the King of Sodom, mixed himself up with the things of Sodom, he would have been involved, in some measure, as was his brother Lot, in its overthrow. He himself would have been saved, but his work would have been burnt up. But Abraham was looking for "a city that hath foundations," and he knew at once that Sodom was not that city, and hence he would have nothing whatever to do with it. He would "hate even the garment spotted by the flesh" — he

would "touch not the unclean thing," and now he was permitted to realise the blessed results of his conduct, for, while Lot had to retreat in confusion and sorrow to a cave in the mountains, his wife and all his possessions being lost, Abraham takes his stand, in all that blessed calmness and dignity which ever characterised him, in the presence of Jehovah, and from thence surveys the heart-rending scene.

But what of Lot? How did he end his course? "Oh, tell it not in Gath! publish it not in the streets of Askelon!" Well may we desire to throw a veil over the closing scene of the life of one who does not seem to have ever realised, as he should, the power of the *call of God*. He had always displayed a secret desire for the things of Egypt or those of Sodom. His heart does not seem to have been thoroughly detached from the world, and therefore his course was always unsteady; from the time he separated himself from Abraham, he went from bad to worse — from one stage of evil to another, until at last the scene closes with the shocking transaction in the cave; the sad results of which were seen in the persons of Moab and Ammon, the enemies of the people of God.

Thus ended the course of Lot, whose history ought to be a solemn warning to all Christians who feel a tendency to be carried away by the world. The history has not been left on record without a purpose. "Whatever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning," may we therefore learn from the above narrative, "not to lust after evil things," for, although "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," yet it is our place to keep as much out of the way of temptation as we can, and our prayer should ever be "lead us not into temptation." "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2: 17)

Genesis 20 - 21

Lot has now passed off the scene — his sun has gone down amid thick clouds and a gloomy atmosphere; it now remains for us to pursue, for a few moments longer, the narrative of Abraham's ways, and God's dealings with him.

There was one point involved in Genesis 12 which I left untouched, knowing that it would come before us again in this place.

When Abraham went down into Egypt, he entered into a compact with Sarah his wife to *conceal part of the truth*, "Say, I pray thee," said he, "thou art my sister" (Gen. 12: 13). One evil ever leads to another. Abraham was moving in the wrong direction when he went down into Egypt for help, and therefore did not exhibit that refinement of conscience which would have told him of the moral unsoundness of this mental reservation. "Speak every man truth with his neighbour," being a divine principle, would always exercise an influence upon one walking in communion with God; but Abraham's desire to get out of present trial was an evidence of failure in communion, and hence "his moral sense," as a recent writer has termed it, was not as keen or as elevated as it should have been. However, although the Lord plagued Pharaoh's house because of his having taken Sarah into it, and further, although Pharaoh rebukes Abraham for his acting in the matter, yet the latter says nothing whatever about the deliberate compact into which he had entered with his wife, to keep back part of the truth; he silently takes the rebuke and goes on his way, but the root of the evil remained still in his heart, ready to show itself at any time if circumstances should arise to draw it out.

Now, it is marvellous to behold Abraham coming up out of Egypt — building an altar and pitching a tent — exhibiting the noble generosity of faith — vanquishing Chedorlaomer and repulsing the temptation of the King of Sodom — urging his request for a son and heir, receiving the most gracious answer — on his face before God in the sense of His almighty grace and power — entertaining the heavenly strangers and interceding for his brother Lot. In a word, I say, it is marvellous to behold Abraham passing through such brilliant scenes, comprising a series of years, and, all the while, this moral point, in which he had erred at the very threshold of his course, remains unsettled in his heart. True, it did not develop itself during the period to which I have just referred, but why did it not? Because Abraham was not in circumstances to call it out, but there it was notwithstanding. The evil was *not fully brought out* — not confessed, not got rid of — and the proof of this is, that

the moment he again finds himself in circumstances which could act upon *his weak point*, it is at once made manifest that the weak point is there. The temptation through which he passed in the matter of the King of Sodom, was not by any means calculated to touch this peculiar point; nor was anything that occurred to him from the time he came up out of Egypt until he went down into Gerar, calculated to touch it, for had it been touched, it would no doubt have exhibited itself.

We never can know what is in our hearts until circumstances arise to draw it out. Peter did not imagine that he could deny his Lord, but when he got into circumstances which were calculated to act upon his peculiar weakness, he showed that the weakness was there.

It required the protracted period of forty years in the wilderness to teach the children of Israel "what was in their hearts" (Deut. 8: 2) and it is one of the grand results of the course of discipline through which each child of God passes, to lead him into a more profound knowledge of his own weakness and nothingness. "We had the *sentence of death in ourselves*, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1: 9). The more we are growing in the sense of our infirmities, the more shall we see our need of clinging more closely to Christ — drawing more largely upon His grace, and entering more fully into the cleansing virtue and value of His atoning blood. The Christian, at the opening of his course, never knows his own heart; indeed, he could not bear the full knowledge of it; he would be overwhelmed thereby. "The Lord leads us not by the way of the Philistines lest we should see war," and so be plunged, in despair. But He graciously leads us by a circuitous route, in order that our apprehension of His grace may keep pace with our growing self-knowledge.

In Genesis 20, then, we find Abraham again, after the lapse of many years, falling into the old error, a suppression of truth, for which he has to suffer a rebuke from a mere man of the world. The man of the world, in this scene, seemed, for the moment, to possess a more refined moral sense than the man of God. "Said he not unto me," says he, "'She is my sister'! and she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother': in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my

hands have I done this." But mark how God enters the scene for the purpose of vindicating His servant. He says to Abimelech, "Behold, thou art but a dead man." Yes, with all "the integrity of his heart and innocency of his hands" — with all his fine moral sense of right and wrong, he was "but a dead man," when it came to be a question, for one moment, between him and even an erring child of God. God, in His grace, was looking at His dear servant from quite a different point of view from that adopted by Abimelech. All that the latter could see in Abraham was a man guilty of a manifest piece of deception, but God saw more than that, and therefore He says to Abimelech, "Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." What dignity is here put upon Abraham! God himself vindicates him before the world! Not a syllable of reproof! — not a breath of disapprobation! — no, *"he is a prophet and he shall pray for thee and thou shalt live."* How truly consolatory it is for the poor, weak, and harassed believer to remember that His Father is ever viewing him through the medium of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sees nothing whatever upon His child but the excellency and perfectness of Jesus. Thus, while a man of the world may have to rebuke a child of God, as in the case before us, God declares that He values that character which the believer has received from Him more than all the amiability, integrity, and innocency that nature can boast of.

{It has been observed that, if we look through a piece of stained glass, it will cast its peculiar hue upon everything at which we look; we may view the greatest variety of colours, yet do we see in all the shade of the medium through which we are looking. So it is with God. The Medium through which He views His people is Christ; hence, He sees not their various shades and imperfections, for all present to His eye the perfectness of the Lord Jesus. As He is, so are we.

“Beholders, many faults may find

But they can guess at Jesus mind,

content, if written in His book.”}

This reminds us of the way in which the Lord vindicates the Baptist before the multitude, although He had sent a message to himself which must have exercised him deeply: "I say unto you, among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7: 28). Thus, whatever unfavourable aspect the child of God may wear in the world's view, God will ever show Himself the vindicator of such. "He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm" (1 Chr. 16: 21-22).

However, as was observed with regard to John the Baptist, the message sent from the Lord to His servant must have exercised his spirit deeply in secret, so is it in Abraham's case. Abraham must have felt deeply humbled in his soul at the thought of what had occurred, and the consciousness of the fact that God would not enter into judgement with him about it would have augmented that feeling. When Abraham fell into the same error in Egypt we do not find that Pharaoh's reproof produced any manifest effect. He was not humbled by it to such a degree as to make a full confession of the whole thing. He takes his departure out of Egypt, but the root of evil remains in his heart, ready to shoot forth its pernicious branches again. Not so in Genesis 20; here we get at once at the root of the matter — Abraham opens up his whole heart; he confesses that from the very first moment of his course he had retained this thing in his heart which had twice betrayed him into an act, which, to say the least of it, would not bear the light. And as there is the full confession of the evil on his part, so is there the complete renunciation of it — he gets rid of it fully, root and branch. The leaven is put forth out of every corner of his heart, he hearkens to Abimelech's reproof and profits by it; it was God's instrument by which He brought out the matter, and delivered the soul of his servant from the power of evil.

But, in addition to the point upon which we have been dwelling, there was yet another question to be settled ere Abraham could reach the most elevated point of his course as a man of faith. The bondwoman and her son were yet in the house. He must put forth these from *his house* as he had put forth the evil from *his heart*. The house and the heart must be cleared out. In Genesis 21

we find matters brought to a crisis with regard to the bondwoman and her son, concerning whom we have heard comparatively nothing until now. The element of bondage had heretofore lain dormant in Abraham's house because not roused into action, by anything of an opposite nature and tendency. But in the birth of Isaac — the son of the free woman — the child of promise — we see a new element introduced. The spirit of liberty and the spirit of bondage are thus brought into contact, and the struggle must issue in the expulsion of either one or the other. They cannot move on in harmony, for "how can two walk together except they be agreed."

Now we are invited by the apostle, in his Epistle to the Galatians, to behold in these two children, "the two covenants," the one *gendering to bondage*, the other *to liberty*; and further, to behold in them samples of the fleshly and spiritual seed of Abraham, the former, "born after the flesh," the latter, "born after the Spirit." Nor can anything be more marked than the line of demarcation between, not only the two covenants, but the two seeds. They are totally distinct the one from the other, and can never, by any operation, be brought to coalesce. Abraham was made to feel, and that painfully, this fact. "Cast out this and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (Gen. 21: 10). Here the natural result shows itself. The two elements could not mingle. As well might the north and the south winds be expected to blow in all their strength without exciting a convulsion in the elements.

But it was most painful work to Abraham to be obliged thus to thrust forth his son. "The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son;" but it mattered not, he must be put out, for the son of a bondwoman could never inherit the promises made only to the spiritual seed. If Ishmael were to have been retained, it would have been an open allowance of the claims of the flesh. Abraham would have found something "as pertaining to the flesh and would thus have had "whereof to glory." But no — all God's promises are to be made good to those who, like Isaac, are the children of promise, born after the Spirit, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1: 13). Ishmael was manifestly born "of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man," and

"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The flesh must therefore be set aside and kept under, no matter how "grievous" it may be to our hearts. The Christian will often find it grievous enough to keep down the old principle which ever lusts against the new, but the Lord gives spiritual power for the struggle so that "we are more than conquerors through Him that loves us."

But it is not my present purpose to pursue the doctrinal matter involved in this instructive history; were I to do so it would carry me far beyond the limits I have prescribed for myself in this little paper, the design of which is, as before observed, simply to direct attention to a few leading principles put forward in the narrative. I will therefore pass on to the next chapter which is the last of the section laid out for consideration.

Genesis 22

The circumstances through which Abraham passed in chapters 20 and 21 were most important indeed. An evil which had long been harboured in his heart had been put away; the bondwoman and her son, who had so long retained quiet possession of his house, were cast out, and he now stands forth as "a vessel sanctified and meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work."

"And it came to pass *after these things*, that God did tempt [or try] Abraham." Here Abraham is at once introduced into a place of real dignity and honour. When God tries an individual it is a certain evidence of His confidence in him. We never read that "God did tempt Lot" — no, the goods of Sodom furnished a sufficiently strong temptation for Lot. The enemy laid a snare for him in the well-watered plains of Sodom which he seemed but too prone to fall into. Not so with Abraham. He lived more in the presence of God, and was, therefore less susceptible of the influence of that which had ensnared his erring brother.

Now, the test to which God submits Abraham — the furnace in which He tries him, marks at once a pure and genuine metal. Had Abraham's faith not been of the purest and most genuine character, he would assuredly have winced under the fiery ordeal through which we behold him passing in this beautiful chapter. When God

promised Abraham a son, he believed the promise "and it was counted unto him for righteousness." "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." But then, having received this son, having realised the truth of the promise, was there not a danger that he would rest in the *gift* instead of in the *Giver*? Was there not a danger that he would lean upon Isaac, in thinking upon the future seed and future inheritance, rather than upon God Himself who had promised him the seed? Surely there was; and God knew that, and therefore tries His servant in a way, more than anything, calculated to put him to the test as to the object on which his soul was resting. The grand inquiry put to Abraham's heart, in this wondrous transaction, was, "are you still walking before the Almighty God, the quickener of the dead?" God desired to know whether he could apprehend in Him the One who was as able to raise up children from the ashes of his sacrificed son as from the dead womb of Sarah. In other words, God desired to prove that Abraham's faith reached forth, as some one has observed, *to resurrection*, for if it stopped short of this, he never would have responded to the startling command, "Take now, thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Gen. 22: 2). But Abraham "staggered not." He at once responds to the call. God had asked for Isaac, and Isaac must be given, and that too without a breath of murmur. He could give up anything or everything so long as his eye rested upon "the Almighty God." And mark the point of view in which Abraham puts this journey of his to Mount Moriah, "I and the lad will go yonder and *worship*." Yes, it was an act of worship, for he was about to lay upon the altar of the Quickener of the dead the one in whom all God's promises centred. It was an act of worship — most elevated worship, for he was about to prove, in the sight of Heaven and hell, that no other object filled his soul but the Almighty God. Hence, what calmness! what self-possession! what pure devotion! what elevation of mind! what self-renunciation! He never falters throughout the scene. He saddles the ass, prepares the wood, and sets off to Mount Moriah, without giving expression to one anxious thought, although, as far as human eye could see, he was about to lose the object of his heart's most tender affection, yea, the

one upon whom the future interests of his house, to all appearance, depended.

Abraham, however, showed most fully that his heart had found a nearer and dearer object than Isaac, dear as he was; he showed also that his faith was resting upon another object altogether with reference to the future interests of his seed, *and that he was as simply resting upon the promise of Almighty God after the birth of Isaac as before it.*

Behold, then, this man of faith as he ascends the mount, taking with him his "well-beloved"! What a scene of breathless interest!

{It strikes me that we get, in Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah a remarkable type of the mysterious scene afterwards exhibited at Calvary, when God was really providing Himself a lamb. We can have no difficulty in losing sight of Herod and Pilate, the chief priests and scribes, the Pharisees and the multitude, and thus we have none remaining but the Father and the Son who, in company, ascend the Mount and carry out the gracious work of redemption in the unbroken solitude of that place.}

How must the angelic hosts have watched this illustrious father from stage to stage of his wondrous journey, until at last they beheld his hand stretched forth for the knife to slay his son — that son for which he had so long and ardently wished, and for which he had so steadily trusted God. Then again, what an opportunity for Satan to ply his fiery darts! What abundant room for such suggestions as the following, viz., "What will become of the promises of God with regard to the seed and the inheritance, if you thus sacrifice your only son? *Beware* that you are not led astray by some false revelation; or, *if it be true* that God has said so and so, doth not God know that, in the day you sacrifice your son, all your hopes will be blasted? Further, think of Sarah; what will she do if she lose Isaac, after having induced you to expel from your house Ishmael?" All these suggestions, and many beside, the enemy might bring to bear upon the heart of Abraham. Nor would Abraham himself have been beyond the region of those thoughts and reasonings which, at such a time, would not fail to arise within him. What then was his answer to all such dark suggestions?

RESURRECTION! "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: ACCOUNTING THAT GOD WAS ABLE TO RAISE HIM UP, EVEN FROM THE DEAD; FROM WHENCE ALSO HE RECEIVED HIM IN A FIGURE" (Heb. 11: 17-19).

Resurrection is God's mighty remedy for all the mischief and ruin introduced by Satan; when once we arrive at this point, we have done with the power of Satan, the last exercise of which is seen in death. Satan cannot touch the life that has been received in resurrection, for the last exercise of his power is seen in the grave of Christ; beyond that he can do nothing. Hence the security of Church's place; her "life is hidden with Christ in God." Blessed hiding place! May we rejoice in it more and more each day.

I will now draw this paper to a close. We have followed Abraham in his course, from Ur of the Chaldees up to the Mount Moriah — we have seen him resign, at the call of God, family and kindred, lands and possessions, worldly ease and prosperity; and lastly, we have seen him, in the power of faith, at the same call of God, ascend the solitary mount, for the purpose of laying "his only begotten" upon God's altar, and thus to declare that he could give up everything and every one but God Himself — and that, being acquainted with the meaning of "THE ALMIGHTY" and "RESURRECTION," he cared not though he were called to look to the stones for the raising up of seed unto him.

On the other hand, we have followed Lot from Ur of the Chaldees also; but alas! his path was a far different one from that of his brother. He does not seem to have realised the power of the call of God in his own soul; he moved rather under Abraham's influence than under that of Jehovah; hence we find that, while Abraham was, at every step of his journey, letting go the world, Lot was doing the very reverse; he was grasping at the world in every shape and form, and he obtained that at which he was grasping, but what then? What of the end? Ah, that is the point. What of Lot's end? Instead of being a noble spectacle unto angels, and a pattern to all future generations of the faithful — of what faith can enable a man "to do and to suffer" for God — he was just the reverse; he was led away by the

enemy of his soul, who ensnared him by means of the things of the world; he spent his days amid the uncleanness of Sodom, and the scene closes with the sad circumstances in the cave. All he did for God or his people was to beget the Ammonite and the Moabite, the enemies of both.

How wondrous then is that grace, which, speaking of the history of such an one, could say, "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2 Peter 2: 7-8).

Genesis 22: 1-12

DEVOTEDNESS: WHAT IS IT?

It has often been said, "There are two sides to every question." This saying is true and very important. It demands special attention in approaching the subject which stands at the head of this paper. The history of the professing Church affords many proofs of the fact that serious mischief has been done by devoted men who were not guided by sound principle. Indeed it will ever be found that, in proportion to the degree of the devotedness, will be the gravity of the mischief where the judgment is not wisely directed. We must confess we long for more true devotedness in ourselves and others. It does seem to us the special need today. There is abundance of profession, even of a very high character. Knowledge is greatly increased among us and we are thankful for knowledge, but knowledge is not energy and profession is not devotedness. It is not that we desire to set the one against the other; we want to combine the two. "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind."

Mark this lovely union, this exquisite entwining of a threefold cord — "Power, love and a sound mind." Were it *power* alone, it might lead one to carry himself with a high hand and to push aside or crush any who could not come up to one's own mark — to cherish and manifest a spirit of haughty independence, to be intolerant of any difference of thought or feeling. On the other hand, were it a spirit of *love* only, it might induce an easygoing temper, a total indifference to the claims of truth and holiness — a readiness to tolerate error for the sake of peace. But there is both love and power, the one to balance the other. Moreover, there is the *sound mind* to adjust the two and give to each its proper range and its just application. Such is the adjusting power of Holy Scripture for which we cannot be too thankful.

We are so apt to be one-sided — to run to wild extremes, to run one principle to seed while another, though equally important, is not even allowed to take root. One will be all for what he calls power, another for what he calls love. Again, one will extol energy;

another will only speak of the value of principle. We want both, and our God most graciously supplies both. A man who is all for principle may do nothing through fear of doing wrong. A man who is all for power may do mischief through fear of doing nothing. But the man who is enabled by grace to combine the two, will do the right thing at the right time and in the right way. This is what we want. And to meet in some feeble way this want is one special object of this paper to which may God most graciously attach the seal of His blessing.

In handling our theme it may help us in the way of clearness and precision to first consider the ground; secondly, the spirit; and thirdly, the object.

The Ground Of True Devotedness

If we answer this question from the ample materials furnished by the history of Abraham, we must say it is simple faith in the living God. This must be the solid ground of true, earnest, steady devotedness. If there is not the link of personal faith in God, we shall be driven here and there by every breath of human opinion and tossed about by every ripple of the tide of circumstances. If we are not conscious of this living link between our souls and God, we shall never be able to stand at all, much less to make any headway in the path of real devotedness. "Without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11: 6).

Here lies the secret. We must believe *that* He is and *what* He is. We must have to do with God in the secret of our own souls, apart from and independent of all beside. Our individual connection with God must be a grand reality, a living fact, a real and unmistakable experience, lying at the very root of our existence and forming the stay and prop of our souls at all times and under all circumstances. Mere opinions will not do; dogmas and creeds will not avail. It will not be sufficient to say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty." Neither this nor any other form of mere words will do. It must be a heart question, a matter between the soul and God Himself. Nothing short of this can sustain the soul at any time, but

more particularly in a day like the present in which we find ourselves surrounded by so much that is hollow and superficial.

Few things tend more to sap the foundations of the soul's confidence than a large amount of unreal profession. One may gather this in some measure from the fact that the finger of the infidel is continually pointed at the gross inconsistencies exhibited in the lives of the teachers and professors of religion. And although it be true that such inconsistencies, even were they multiplied ten thousand fold, will never shelter the infidel from the just consequences of his unbelief inasmuch as each one must give account of himself and for himself before the judgment seat of Christ, yet it is a fact that unreal profession tends to shake confidence. Hence the urgent need of simple, earnest, personal faith in God — of unquestioning childlike confidence in His Word, of constant dependence upon His wisdom, goodness, power and faithfulness.

This is the anchor of the soul without which it will be impossible to ride securely in the midst of Christendom's troubled waters. If we are in any way propped up by our circumstances, if we are leaning upon an arm of flesh, if we are deriving support from the thoughts of a mortal, if our faith stands in the wisdom of man or the best of men, if our fear toward God is taught by the precept of men, we may rest assured that all this will be tested and fully manifested. Nothing will stand except the faith that endures as seeing Him who is invisible — that looks not at the things that are seen and temporal, but at the things that are unseen and eternal.

How vividly all this was illustrated in the life of the father of the faithful, we may easily learn from the marvelous history of his life given by the pen of inspiration. "Abraham believed God." Observe, it was not something *about* God that he believed — some doctrine or opinion respecting God, received by tradition from man. No; this would never have availed for Abraham. It was with God Himself he had to do in the profoundest depths of his own individual being. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee" (Acts 7: 2-3).

These opening sentences of Stephen's powerful address to the Council set forth the true secret of Abraham's entire career from Ur of the Chaldees to Mount Moriah. It is not our purpose to dwell upon the solemn and instructive interval at Charran. Our desire is rather to set before the reader, as plainly and pointedly as we can, the unspeakable value, the absolute necessity of faith in God, not only for life and salvation, but for anything like true devotedness of heart to Christ and His cause. True, that honored servant of God tarried at Charran, traveled down into Egypt, turned to Hagar, trembled at Gerar and denied his wife. All this appears upon the surface of his history, for he was but a man — even a man of like passions with ourselves. But “he believed God.”

Yes, from first to last, this remarkable man exercised in the main an unshaken confidence in the living God. He believed in that great truth that lies at the bottom of all truth, namely, that God is; and he believed also that God is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek Him. It was this that drew Abraham forth from Ur of the Chaldees — from the midst of all those ties and associations in the which he had lived and moved and had his being. It was this that sustained him through all the changes of his pilgrim-course. Finally, it was this that enabled him to stand on Mount Moriah and there show himself ready to lay upon the altar that one who was not only the son of his bosom, but also the channel through which all the families of the earth were yet to be blessed.

Nothing but faith could have enabled Abraham to turn his back upon the land of his birth, to go forth not knowing where he went. To the men of his day he must have seemed to be a fool or a madman. But oh! he knew whom he believed. Here lay the source of his strength. He was not following cunningly devised fables. He was not propped up by the circumstances or the influences which surrounded him. He was not supported by the thoughts of man. Flesh and blood afforded him no aid in his wonderful career. God was his shield, his portion and his reward, and in leaning on Him he found the true secret of all his victory over the world and of that calm and holy elevation which characterized him from first to last.

Reader, have you faith in God? Do you know Him? Is there a link between your soul and Him? Can you trust Him for everything?

Are you at this moment consciously leaning upon Him, upon His Word, upon His arm? Remember, if there is any darkness or hesitation as to this, devotedness is and must be out of the question. All steady devotedness rests upon the solid ground of personal faith in the living God. We cannot too strongly insist upon this in a day of profession as widespread as it is shallow. It will not do to *say* “we believe.” There is far too much of this, far too much head knowledge and lip profession, far too much of mere surface work.

It is easy to *say* we believe, but as James puts it, “What doth it profit though a man *say* he have faith?” Faith is a divine reality and not a mere human effort. It is based upon divine revelation and not upon the working of human reason. It connects the soul with God with a living, mighty link which nothing can ever snap. It bears the soul above and carries it on in triumph, come what may. There may be failure and confusion, error and evil, coldness and deadness, strife and division, breaking down and turning aside, stumblings and inconsistencies — all manner of things to shake the confidence and stagger the soul — but faith holds on its peaceful, steady way, undaunted and undismayed. Faith leans on God alone and finds all its springs in Him. Nothing can touch the faithfulness of God and nothing can shake the confidence of the heart that simply takes God at His word.

And be it remembered that faith is simply taking God at His word. It is believing what God says because He says it. It is taking God's thoughts in place of our own. “He that believeth hath set to his seal that God is true.” How simple! God has revealed Himself, faith walks in the light of that revelation. God has spoken, faith believes the Word. But, if it be asked, “How has God revealed Himself? Where is His voice to be heard?” He has revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, and His voice may be heard in His Word. He has not, blessed be His name, left us in the darkness of night, nor even in the dimness of twilight. He has poured upon us the full flood-tide of His own eternal truth so we may possess all the certainty, all the clearness, all the authority which a divine revelation can give.

Is it asked, “How can we know that God has spoken?” We reply, “How can we know the sun is shining?” Surely by the gentle

influence of its beams. How can we know the dew has fallen? Surely by its refreshing influence upon the earth and by the luster of its pearly drops. So of the precious Word of God. It speaks for itself. Do I want a philosopher to tell me the sun is shining or the dewdrops are falling? Assuredly not. I feel their influence. I recognize their power. No doubt a philosopher might explain to me the properties of light and a chemist might instruct me as to the component parts of the dew. They might do all this for me, even though I had been born and reared in a coal-mine and had never seen either the one or the other. But they could not make me feel their influence. So it is in a divine way as to the Word of God. It makes itself felt — felt in the heart, felt in the conscience, felt in the deep chambers of the soul. True, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit, but all the while, there is power in the Word.

Let us remember this. Let no one imagine that God cannot speak to the heart or that the heart cannot understand what He says and feel the power of His Word. Cannot a father speak to his child and cannot the child understand his father? Yes, surely, and our heavenly Father can speak to our very hearts and we can hear His voice and know His mind and lean upon His eternal Word. And this is faith — simple, living, saving faith. Such a definition of faith might not satisfy a profound theologian, but that makes no difference. The heart does not need learned theological definitions. It wants God and it has Him in His Word. God has spoken. He has revealed Himself. He has come forth from the thick darkness, chased away the shades of twilight, and shone upon us in the face of Jesus Christ and on the eternal pages of Holy Scripture.

Reader, have you found Him? Do you really know Him by the revelation which He has given and by the Word which He has spoken? Is His Word a reality to you? Is it your stay and support? Is it the real ground on which you are resting for time and eternity? Do, we beseech you, make sure work of it at this moment. See to it that you have a living faith in God and such a sense of the value, the importance and the authority of His Word, that you would rather part with all else than surrender it. It is the only ground of devotedness. It is utterly impossible that a heart distracted and tossed about with unbelieving reasonings can ever be truly devoted

to Christ or His service. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is." How simple! How plain! How could Abraham have left his country; how could he have run the race; how could he have given up everything and come forth as a stranger and a pilgrim, not having so much ground as to set his foot upon? How could he have stood upon Mount Moriah and stretched forth his hand for the knife to slay his son? How could he have done all or any of these things if he did not have simple faith in the one living and true God? Impossible.

And so in your case, beloved reader, unless you can trust God, unless you are sustained by the real power of simple faith in the Word of the living God, you will never be able to get on. In fact, you have no life in you. Truly we may say, "No faith, no life." There may be high profession. There may be the semblance of devotedness, but if there is not a living faith, there can be no spiritual life. And if there is no life there cannot be any true devotedness. "The just shall live by faith." They not only get life by faith, but live day by day and hour by hour *by faith*. It is the spring of life and power to the soul all the journey through. It connects the soul with God, and by so doing imparts steadiness, consistency, energy and holy decision to the servant of Christ. If there be not the constant exercise of faith in God, there will be fluctuation and uncertainty. Work will be taken up by fits and starts, instead of being the necessary result of calm abiding in Christ by faith. There will be an occasional rush at some line of service which is merely taken up for the time and then coldly abandoned. The course, instead of being a steady, upward and onward one, will be zigzag and most unsatisfactory. At times there will be a feverish excitement, and then again, deadness and indifference.

All this is the very reverse of true devotedness. It does serious damage to the cause of Christ. Better to never start on the course at all, than having started, to turn aside and give it up. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." True devotedness is based upon a profound and earnest faith in God. It has its root deep down in the heart. It is not fitful or whimsical, but calm, consistent, decided and steadily progressive. It may at times, when tried by the rule of a romantic and visionary enthusiasm, seem slow-paced, but if it is slow it is only because it

will be sure. The end will prove the difference between the energy of nature and the acting of faith.

May God by His Spirit lead all His people into a truer and deeper sense of what devotedness really is. There is an energy abroad. The minds of men are active. Principles as well as passions are in action. Contending elements are at work underneath the surface of human life. Society is becoming more and more an unsettled thing. Men seem to be on the lookout for something. There is evidently a crisis at hand. Men are taking sides. The stage is being reared for some grand act of the drama. What is needed in view of all this? Unquestionably, a calm, deep, earnest faith in the Word of God. This is the only thing to keep the heart steady, come what may. Nothing will keep the soul in peace; nothing can give fixedness to the course; nothing can maintain us in the path of devotedness but the realization of that living link between the soul and God Himself, which, as being divine and eternal, must of necessity outlive all that is merely human and temporal.

Having sought to lay down what we consider to be the essential *ground* of all true devotedness — an earnest, personal faith in the living God — we shall now, in dependence upon divine guidance and teaching, proceed to consider:

The Spirit of Devotedness

The two things are intimately connected inasmuch as it is impossible for anyone to have to do with God in the realities of a life of faith, without having his heart drawn out in true worship. And the spirit of worship is, in very deed, the spirit that must ever characterize true devotedness. It is faith alone that gives God His proper place and leaves the scene clear for Him to display Himself in His own proper glory. Hence it is that faith enjoys ten thousand occasions of realizing what God is to all who trust Him and diligently seek Him, and each fresh realization draws forth fresh strains of praise. Thus a living faith ministers to a spirit of worship, and a spirit of worship is the vehicle through which to convey the experiences of a living faith. The more we trust God the more we shall know Him, and the more we know Him the more we must praise Him.

We have little idea of how much we lose by our lack of simple confidence in God. Unbelief ever hinders the display of divine power and goodness. "He could there do not many mighty works because of their unbelief." This holds good in our individual history every day. God will not show Himself if our unbelief fills the field of vision with other objects. It is impossible that God and the creature can occupy the same platform or jointly form the ground of the soul's confidence. It must be God alone from first to last. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation Trust in Him at all times." Such is the language of faith "only and at all times." This is the ground — the solid and unassailable ground of true devotedness — and the soul that really occupies this ground will ever be clothed with a spirit of worship. Faith counts on God; God reveals Himself to faith; and faith responds in words of praise and adoration. Nothing can be simpler and nothing on earth more blessed. Faith can ever address God in the following words, "Lord, You know me; we are on the same old terms." Blessed term! May we understand them better!

There is nothing in all this world like having to do with God in the secret of our own souls and in all the details of our personal history, day by day. It imparts a calmness not easily ruffled, a stability not easily moved, a holy independence of human thinkings and speakings, a moral elevation that lifts the soul above the reach of surrounding influences. There is an atmosphere enwrapping this world — an atmosphere so dense, so murky, so depressing, that nothing but the eye of faith can pierce it. Our own hearts also are full of unbelief, ever ready to depart from the living God, constantly sending up infidel reasonings from within or hearkening to infidel suggestions from without. Therefore we so greatly need to have the foundations of our personal confidence strengthened so our devotedness may be of a more decided type.

But in contemplating the spirit of devotedness as illustrated in the life of Abraham, we must look somewhat closely at the facts of his instructive history, especially at those facts which immediately precede his call to Mount Moriah. For example in Genesis 20 we find him called to apply the sharp knife of self-judgment to an old root of evil which had found lodging in his heart for many days.

This self-same root may teach the writer and the reader a deeply solemn and an eminently practical lesson.

When Abraham started on his career, we may notice that he was clogged and hindered by a natural tie and that he was secretly influenced by a root of moral evil. The natural tie was snapped at Charran by the hand of death and Abraham was set free and enabled to get up to the place to which God had called him. (Compare carefully Genesis 11: 31-32 and Genesis 12 with Acts 7: 2-4). He was told to get up out of his country and from his kindred and come into the land of Canaan, but he brought some of his kindred with him and stopped short at Charran. There his father died. Thereupon Abraham made his way to the true point of divine revelation.

The ties of nature, right enough and really of God in their proper place, are sure, if not kept in their place, to hinder true devotedness. It was all right and very beautiful in Elisha to love with the tenderness of a son, his father and mother, but when Elijah had flung around him the prophetic mantle, it was entirely below the mark of a deep-toned and genuine devotedness to say, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother and then I will follow thee." Natural ties are like honey: we must beware of how much we eat and when. Was ever a son's love so tender as that which glowed in the bosom of the Man Christ Jesus? Was ever subjection to parental authority so divinely perfect as His? And yet when the claims of service were to be responded to, when the integrity of true Nazariteship was to be maintained, He could say, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" And again, "Who is My mother?" It was only the true and perfect Servant who knew how to adjust conflicting claims and keep each in its place. Hence from the same lips flowed forth the words of faithful Nazariteship at one time, and words of melting tenderness at another.

Abraham was hindered in his course by the tie of nature until that tie was dissolved by death, but the root of moral evil seems to have clung to him for a much longer period of time. What was that root? Regretfully, it was one which we can only too well understand — a little bit of unbelief, clothing itself in the form of humanly-prudent reserve in reference to his relationship to Sarah.

“What!” it may be said, “Unbelief in the heart of the father of the faithful?” Just so. It is a remarkable fact, illustrated in the history of the most eminent saints of God, that their most remarkable failure appears in the very thing for which they were most noted. Moses, the meekest man in all the earth, spoke unadvisedly. Job, the model of patience, cursed his day. Abraham, the father of the faithful, carried in his heart for many a long day and through many a changing scene, a root of unbelief. This root first sprouted in the land of Egypt where Abraham had gone to escape the famine that raged in the land of Canaan. And as might be expected, the sprouting brought trouble on himself and others. “And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister, that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.”

Reader, remember the Holy Spirit has penned this faithful record for our learning and admonition, and truly it is most solemn to think that such a man as Abraham could be so governed by the fear of personal danger as to expose the object of his heart's fond affections to loss of virtue and to deny his relationship to her. True, this conduct was the result of his being in a wrong position, for had he remained in the place to which God had called him, there would have been no need to deny his wife. But as it generally happens, one wrong step led to another, and having gone into Egypt through fear of the famine, he there denies his wife through fear of death.

“And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.” What marvelous grace to Abraham! God, who ever delights to rebuke his people's fears as well as to answer their faith, covered His erring servant with the shield of His powerful protection. Abraham's life and Sarah's virtue were both preserved in safety behind that impenetrable shield, and the house of Egypt's monarch was made to feel the heavy stroke of Jehovah's righteous rod. “And Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me that

she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, she is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife.” Abraham had evidently exposed himself in all this matter. Hence, although God protects him, He yet allows Pharaoh to rebuke him.

It is well to see this. When the man of God steps off the path of faith and christian integrity, he at once exposes himself to the men of this world, and he need not marvel if they chastise him with an unsparing hand. Had Abraham remained in Canaan, he would not have been reproved by Pharaoh in Egypt. It is better far to starve, if it must be so, in the path of obedience than gain abundance by the sacrifice of faith and moral uprightness. May we have grace to remember this at all times! It is easy enough to put these things down on paper, but when the moment of temptation arises, it is another thing. Still we must remember that the Spirit of God has penned the history of Abraham for our profit, and it is well for us to ponder its holy lessons.

Now let us enquire as to the effect produced in Abraham by Pharaoh's sharp reproof. Did it prove effective in delivering him from the root of evil which had called it forth? Regretfully no. So far as the inspired history informs us, Abraham received the rebuke in silence and went on his way, but he carried the root along with him to sprout again. He received a fresh revelation from God; he obtained a splendid victory over Chedorlaomer and his confederates and refused the tempting offer of the king of Sodom; he was comforted by fresh assurances and promises from God and manifested a child-like faith which was counted unto him for righteousness. In short, he passed through a variety of scenes and circumstances with varied exercises of soul no doubt, but all the while, the moral root to which we are directing the reader's attention, remained unjudged and unconfessed.

That root had sprouted and produced its bitter fruit, but as yet the sharp knife of self-judgment remained to be applied to it. It is not until we reach Genesis 20 that this root again appears above the surface in the matter of Abimelech, King of Gerar. Here we have the same scene enacted over again after years of rich experience of divine goodness and loving-kindness. The King of Egypt and his house had been brought into trouble before, and the King of Gerar

and his house are brought into trouble now, for Jehovah reproved kings for Abraham's sake though the kings had reason to reprove Abraham because of his ways.

“Then Abimelech called Abraham and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham “What sawest thou that thou hast done this thing?” This was bringing the father to a point. There was no escaping such plain dealing. Therefore Abraham frankly opens his heart and unlocks that secret chamber which had been kept shut for so many years. He tells out all and exposes every fiber of the root which had proved the source of so much trouble to himself and others. Let us hearken to the unreserved confession of this dear and honored man of God. “And Abraham said, because I thought, surely, the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me at every place whither we shall come, say of me, he is my brother.”

Here was the root of the whole matter. Why do we dwell upon it? Why seek to unfold it in such detail? Simply for the spiritual profit and moral health of the Christian reader. Have we not all our roots? Yes, verily, deep, strong and bitter roots — roots which have been the source of a world of sorrow and shame to ourselves and of trouble to those with whom we had to do. Well then, these roots must be reached and judged, for as long as they remain unreached and unjudged, it is utterly impossible that we can reach the higher stages of the path of devotedness. Need we remind the reader that it is not a question of life or salvation? Need we recall him to the thesis of our paper which is simply “What is devotedness?” Our one grand object is to raise the tone of devotedness in the soul of every Christian who may scan these lines. But we know that devotedness, to be true, steady and effective, must rest on the proper ground and breathe the proper spirit. That ground is faith; that spirit is worship; and though it be quite true that a soul may occupy, in the main, the

ground of faith and breathe a spirit of worship while there are many roots in the heart unreached and unjudged, we are nevertheless fully persuaded that so long as there is any hidden root of evil in the heart, any chamber which we keep locked and refuse to have properly lighted and ventilated, the higher stages of practical devotedness are yet beyond and above us.

God knows we do not want to depress the heart of the reader. Indeed, if our lines have anything of a depressing tendency, their effect should be realized first and most of all by the writer himself. But we desire to encourage and exhort, and it is with a simple view to these desirable ends that we now turn directly to the reader and put this plain and pointed question home to him, Have you any secret reserve in your soul? Do you have any hidden root of evil deep down in your heart and mind? Is there anything you are keeping back from the action of the light and from the edge of the knife? Search and see! Search diligently! Do not deceive yourself nor let Satan deceive you. Deal honestly and truly with your own soul in this matter. Let no false application of the doctrines or principles of grace prevent you from exercising a most rigid censorship over your ways, your character and your heart with all its motive springs and hidden chambers.

Be assured of it, there is an urgent demand for real heart work on the part of all who long to tread the highest stages of the divine life. We live in a day which is earning for itself the title of "A day of shams." Yes, reader, *sham* seems stamped upon all around, whether in politics, commerce or manufacturing, and most assuredly, much of the Christianity of the day forms no sort of exception to the rule. Hence the demand for *reality* on the part of the true Christian. And, unquestionably, all reality must find its source in the heart. If the heart is not right and real with God, we cannot be real in anything.

There is another point to which we must refer in the life of Abraham before we close this part of our subject. It is presented in Genesis 21. The bondwoman and her son are cast out of the house. We do not dwell upon this point, but merely name it for the purpose of pointing out the deep moral conveyed to us in this portion of Abraham's history. The heart and the house had both to come under judgment before the call to Moriah fell on the patriarch's ears. God

was about to call His beloved servant into the very highest position that man can occupy, to demand of him an expression of devotedness of the very highest order, to pass him through a crucible of the very highest degree of intensity. And, be it observed, before He did so, the root of moral evil had been reached in the heart and the legal element had been expelled from the house. All this is deeply practical.

God deals with moral realities. If we are to walk with Him along the high and holy pathway of pure devotedness, the heart and the house must be duly regulated. If the real desire of our hearts be after a closer walk with God, we must see to it that we are not retaining anything within or about us that would not agree with that nearness. Our God is infinitely gracious, merciful and patient. He can bear with us and wait upon us in marvelous tenderness, but at the same time, we have to remember that we forfeit present blessing and future reward through our lack of earnest devotedness. There is nothing of legality in this: it is but the just application of the principle of grace in which we stand.

“And it came to pass that God did tempt Abraham.” Why is it we never read such words as “It came to pass that God did tempt Lot?” Alas! Lot was never in a moral condition to warrant his being so highly honored. *Sodom* tempted Lot, but it was no temptation at all to Abraham. What a contrast between Lot in the cave and Abraham on Mount Moriah! Yet they were both saved. But what a poor thing to be *content* to be saved! Ought we not to sigh after those spiritual heights which lie beyond? Should we not long to give expression to a more ardent devotedness? Oh! that our houses and our hearts were in a moral condition acceptable in the sight of God so we might enjoy habitual nearness to Himself and unbroken communion with Him. This is our privilege and we should never be satisfied with anything else.

It was a high honor conferred upon Abraham when God called him into the place of trial — when He asked him for “his son, his only son Isaac.” It was an elevated point in the patriarch's career, and that he felt it to be such we may judge from the spirit in which he responded to the divine call and in the manner in which he traveled to the scene of sacrifice. “I and the lad will go yonder and

worship.” Here the true spirit of devotedness most blessedly unfolds itself. To give up his only son, the object of his affections, the channel of all God's promises, to lay this one as a victim on the altar and see him consumed to ashes, what was it all? Just an act of worship! This was real work indeed. It was no empty lip profession, no saying “I go, sir” and yet not going at all. “Abraham believed God.” Here lay the secret of it all. He had learned to yield an unquestioning, implicit obedience to the Word of the Lord. Therefore when called to lay his Isaac upon the altar as a sacrifice — that Isaac for whom he had longed and waited and trusted — he bows his head and says, “I and the lad will go yonder and worship.”

Thank God there lived such a man as Abraham, that there was enacted such a scene as that upon Mount Moriah, and that we have so vividly and forcibly presented to our hearts the ground and the spirit of true devotedness!

The more we ponder the question which has been occupying our attention, namely, What is devotedness? the more we are convinced of its immense practical importance. It puts the soul in immediate contact with the Lord Himself and opens a path for each one, along which he can move in calm and steady confidence, let his surroundings be what they may.

But just in proportion to the importance of the subject of devotedness is the need of clearness as to the true ground, spirit and object thereof. We have already sought to present to the reader the truth as to the first two points. Now it remains to dwell on

The Object of Devotedness

How much hangs on the answer which the heart gives to this question, “What is my object in life?” It is, undoubtedly, one of the very gravest questions which anyone can put to himself. It is the object which stamps the character. Let us remember this. What was it that gave character to Abraham's journey to Moriah and to his conduct when he arrived there? What was it that drew the attention of heaven to the scene? Was it the mere fact that a father was going to offer up his son as a sacrifice? No; thousands of fathers have done that. Thousands of sons have been sacrificed on the altars of false

gods, and that too, in so-called devotedness. But what was it that distinguished the act of the father of the faithful? It was this: let us hear it and mark it with the heart's deepest attention. "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me" (Gen. 22: 12). Here we have Abraham's object, and on this point let us meditate for a few moments.

The heart may propose to itself a thousand objects. These objects may be good enough in themselves, yet not one of them be the object which characterizes Christian devotedness. We once knew a man who prayed for seven hours a day. We have seen him on his knees at four o'clock in the morning. And after the toils of the day we have seen him on his knees again till the midnight hour. We have seen him in agonies of devotion. His flesh was worn from his bones by constant kneeling. He was a blameless, friendly man. Those who marked the course of his daily life could not put their finger on a single moral blemish in his conduct as a man. And yet when we approached that man to speak some word about Christ, he shrunk from us and refused to listen. He was devoted to his religion *but he hated Christ*.

Again, a man may devote himself to philanthropy. He may devote his life and his fortune to the objects of benevolence and make the most splendid sacrifices to carry out his schemes. He may fix the wondering gaze of millions upon his career, yet be a total stranger to Christ.

Further, a man may devote himself to what may seem to be the work of the Lord. He may seem to be a laboring student of Scripture, an active, earnest, self-denying evangelist. He may go forth to the fields of foreign mission, leaving his country, his kindred and his home in devotion to his work. He may do all this and much more, and yet not exhibit one atom of true Christian devotedness simply because *Christ* was not his object in all that in which he was engaged.

All this is deeply solemn. We may be religious, devotional, benevolent, active in the Lord's work in all its departments, whether as evangelists, pastors or teachers, and yet not have Christ before our souls at all. A man may start in a work which, to all outward

appearance, seems a real work of God. He may seem to be most simple in his devotion to that work and yet, it may turn out in the end that his heart was engrossed with the work to the total exclusion of Christ as an object. True Christian devotedness is embodied in this brief sentence, "*To me, to live is Christ.*" Paul does not say, "To me to live is work," though where was there ever such a workman except the perfect Workman? He does not say, "To me to live is religion or benevolence or morality," though who more religious, benevolent or moral than Paul? It is not that he loved these things less, but he loved Christ more. This makes all the difference. I may wear myself out with religious exercises such as prayers, fastings and vigils; I may bestow all my goods to feed the poor; I may give my body to be burned, yet there may not be in all these things one particle of genuine devotedness to Christ.

Is not this a very weighty consideration in this day of religious activity, forms of piety and schemes of benevolence? Should we not, dear Christian reader, look well to the question as to what is our real object? Is it not too true that one may spend a whole life in the exercise of religion and philanthropy, and yet live and die a stranger to that One who is God's only object, heaven's only center — Christ Jesus? Sadly, the truth of this is illustrated in the history of millions. The god of this world is blinding the minds of countless multitudes. And with what does he most effectively blind them? With schemes of benevolence and forms of piety. Oh! Christendom, Christendom, hear it: thy rituals, thy forms and thy schemes are blinding the minds, hardening the hearts and searing the consciences of untold millions.

It is not merely amid the haunts of vice in all its abominable forms, that God's faithful messengers are called to raise a warning voice, but on the broad and well-trodden highway of religious profession, along which multitudes are rushing to eternal doom. *The devil's grand object is to keep Christ out of the heart and he cares not by what means he attains this object.* He will use a man's lusts or he will use his superstitious fears. Forms of vice and forms of piety are all alike to him. *He hates Christ* and will seek by all means to keep souls away from Him. He will let a man be religious, benevolent, friendly, moral, but he will not, if he can help it, let him

be a Christian. And when anyone has through grace become a Christian in reality, Satan's one aim is to draw his heart and turn his eye away from Christ. He will seek to engage him with objects professedly Christian to divert him from the only Object that really forms the Christian — Christ Himself. He will give him lots of work to do: he will *overwhelm* him with work and get him a name as a most wonderful workman. And yet, by means of this very work, he will sap the foundation of a man's Christianity and so deceive and pervert his heart that, in process of time, he will become occupied with *himself* and his doings instead of with Christ and His service!

Hence the importance of having the one object ever before the heart and that object is Christ. "To me to live is Christ." "Thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." Christ is the great standard for everyone and everything. All must be measured by Him. Everything is to be regulated and valued with reference to Him. The question is not, how much work am I doing? but to whom is it done? Searching question! "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked, and ye clothed Me; I was sick and ye visited Me; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me... inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Matt. 25: 34-40).

Here lies the secret of all acceptable service and all true devotedness. We may feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, but if the King cannot say, "Ye did it unto Me," it will be valueless.

Oh! what a privilege to be allowed to do any little thing for Christ! To be enabled to have Him ever before the heart! It is this which gives real value and true elevation to all we may be called to do in this world, whether it be sweeping a sidewalk or evangelizing a nation. Christian service is that which is done to Christ. Nothing else deserves the name; nothing else will be so esteemed in God's account; nothing else will pass as genuine gold through the fire of that great testing day which is rapidly approaching. All the thoughts of God center around Jesus. It is His eternal purpose to exalt and

glorify that Name. The whole universe will yet be called upon to find in Jesus its central sun. The beams of His glory shall, before long, shine forth over the whole creation.

Thus it will be very soon. Now, the Christian is called to *anticipate* that day and to make Jesus his one absorbing, commanding object in all things. If he gives alms it is to be in the name of Jesus; if he preaches the gospel for the conversion and gathering of souls, it is to be with his eye fixed directly upon Jesus and for the glory of His Name. Will this restrict the sphere or measure of his benevolence? Will it lessen his interest in the work of evangelization? Quite the reverse; it will greatly enlarge the former and intensify the latter, and while it does all this it will elevate the tone of his spirit in the work and impart stability to all his service because it will ever keep his heart and mind occupied with the very highest object, even Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

I may enter upon a certain line of work under the influence of excitement or in imitation of others, or to get a name for myself from all manner of motives. I may work with an energy and zeal which puts others to shame. I may be greatly looked up to get a great name among my fellows. I may be puffed, flattered and applauded. My name may appear as a celebrity in all the religious journals of the day. Yet, after all this, the Lord may not be able to say as to a single act of all my service, "You did it unto Me."

On the other hand a man may pursue a path of quiet, unobtrusive, unostentatious service, unknown and unnoticed, and not wishing to be noticed. The stream of his benevolence may flow abundantly, unknown to all except to those who are refreshed by its influence, and for the most part, not even by them. The lanes, the alleys, the courtyards, the prisons, the hospitals are visited; the widow's tear is dried, her sorrow soothed, her wants supplied; the orphan is thought of; the sons and daughters of toil and misery are looked after; the precious tidings of salvation are sounded in many a room; the gospel tract is slipped into many a hand; and all the while, little is heard or known down here of the doer of these precious, these most fragrant acts of service and self-sacrifice. But the odor goes up to the throne. The record is above: it is all engraved on the

Father's heart. He remembers it all and will bring it all out in due time and after such a fashion that the doer would not recognize his own work.

Who knew what was in Abraham's heart when he started on that marvelous journey to Moriah — a journey which has only been exceeded in marvelous mystery by that from Gethsemane to Calvary? Who knew what he was going to do? Who would ever have known it if the Holy Spirit had not recorded it on the eternal page of inspiration? "I and the lad will go yonder and worship." "They went both of them together." "Thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." Abraham was engrossed with God from first to last. From the moment he rose from his couch on that memorable morning, until he stretched forth his hand to take the knife, his soul was absorbed with the living God. It was this that gave holy elevation to the entire scene. It was done for God.

Thus it is always. Whatever is done for Christ will be remembered and rewarded; whatever is not will sink into eternal oblivion or be burned up in judgment. It is not the *quantity* but the *quality* of the work that will be tried and made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. Look at the parable of the laborers in Matthew 20. What a seasonable lesson does that parable read out to our hearts! The laborers who were first hired were the only ones with whom an agreement was made; all the rest worked in the confidence that their Master would give them what was right. If any of the first set of laborers had been asked during the day, "What are you to get as a reward for your work?" they would have said "A penny." They were working for a penny. But if any of the others had been asked the same question, they would have said, "I don't know, but I am sure the Master will do what is right."

This makes all the difference. The moment I work for reward, it ceases to be Christian service. It is not that Christian service will not be rewarded: it most assuredly will, but just so far as it is Christian service, it will be rendered apart from all thought of reward. "The love of Christ," not the hope of reward, "constraineth us." Why did the wicked and slothful servant hide his talent in the earth? Because he did not know his Lord. Had he known Him, he

would have loved Him and served Him for love's sake, which is the only service that Christ values.

It was, we may rest assured, joy to Abraham's soul to have a son to lay on the altar of God. And so with the true Christian now; it is his joy to be permitted to render any little service to that Lord whom he loves supremely. Nor will it be a question with him as to the kind of service or the sphere in which it is to be rendered, or the amount of the work; it is enough for him if his Lord can say, "You did it unto Me." "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me." It does not matter in the least what we are doing, provided only it be done directly for Christ, with the eye fixed on Him and the heart filled with Him. It is this that imparts value to every little act of service, and if there be one thing more than another which the heart longs for, it is the ability to do all one's work, of whatsoever kind it is, with a single eye to Christ.

But ah! the heart is so treacherous and so prone to have mixed motives. We are apt to attach importance and interest to things because of *our* connection with them, to engage in service for service' sake, to be more occupied with our work than with the Master. May we have grace ever to remember that all that is not done directly to the Lord Himself is absolutely worthless, however showy it may be in the eyes of man; and on the other hand, that the smallest thing done in love to Jesus and in singleness of heart to Him, will never be forgotten.

It would be truly pleasant to the heart to dwell a little longer on this blessed theme, but we must close. Before we do, we desire to leave with the reader this one solemn question, "What is your real object?" We feel the weight of this question and we look to the Spirit of God to give it weight in the heart and conscience of the reader.

To everyone who can say in calm confidence and spiritual intelligence, "I am saved," the next grand point is to be able to say, "Christ is my object: to me to live is Christ." Alas, how few of us can say it. We stop short. We are occupied with our salvation, our peace and blessing, our comfort and liberty, or it may be we are taken up with our service. In a word, it is not Christ — it is not

abiding in Him, feeding on Him and acting for Him. It is really self, and this is downright misery. We should never rest satisfied with anything short of having Jesus as a covering for our eyes and an Object for our hearts. This would be to understand experimentally the ground, the spirit and the object of true devotedness.

Genesis 29

The History of the Tribe of Levi

THE TRIBE OF LEVI ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THEIR FAMILIES

Name	Meaning
First Class	
Gershon	A stranger, or exile
Lael	Dedicated, or belonging to God
Eliasaph	God hath added
Shimei	Hearing, Renowned
Libni	For edification, White
Second Class	
Kothath	Congregation, Assembly
Hebron	Association, communion
Amram	Exalted people, of the exalted One
Izhar	Oil
Uzziel	The strength of God
Third Class	
Merari	Bitterness or sorrow
Mahli	Sick, Pardon or a harp, sickly
Mushi	Yielding, one who has found a

	refuge, forsaking
Abihail	Father of strength
Zuriel	My rock is God

There are few exercises more profitable for the Christian than that of reflecting upon the character of God as unfolded in the history of the saints and fathers of ancient times recorded in the Scriptures of the Old Testament: and indeed this might be expected from the very nature of the subject, which is such that, whatever be its extent, it unfolds principles to us which stand intimately connected with all that is important for us to know or be established in. Thus, whether we get the dealings of God on a limited scale, as with any one of the fathers personally, or more widely extended, as with the seed of Israel afterwards, it is nevertheless the same lesson we are called upon to learn, namely, God and man. Now, this is what should enhance exceedingly the value of the Old Testament to the Christian; almost the great body of its teaching is of the above character: and not only so, but it also (as looked at in this point of view) guards effectually against the mere exercise of imagination; for when we consider the history of any man or people, it is not necessary that we should decide positively what is shadowed out therein;* It is enough for us to see that we have before us a more or less extensive development of the character and actings of God and man; and this, without ever descending beneath the surface of Scripture, cannot fail of being instructive and edifying to the soul.

{*In many of the Old Testament narratives, however, the instruction is so manifestly typical that even the most cautious reader, if at all familiar with Scripture, cannot refuse to look at it in that point of view.}

But, of all the histories of the Old Testament embodying instruction of the above character, I believe there are few more copious, deep and varied than that which is about to engage our attention. If the narrative of a soul taken up by sovereign and eternal grace from the pit of corruption and deep depravity, carried through

the various stages which grace and truth had enacted for sinful man, until at last he is set down in the very sanctuary of God and established in the enjoyment of the covenant of life and peace forever; if, I say, such a narrative would possess charms and present attractions to us, then does the history of Levi abound in this. It is only a matter of astonishment that a history fraught with such rich and varied instruction has not occupied more of the thoughts of those luminaries of the Church whose writings have been a source of comfort and instruction to all who have been taught to value the truth of God.

Yet, much as I see in the history of Levi, and much as I admire what I do see, I could not think of directing the reader's thoughts to the subject without informing him that I purpose doing little more than to bring before his mind in a connected way the various Scriptures which treat of this most interesting question; however, these Scriptures are so plain and striking that no one who is at all familiar with Scripture truths can fail to enter into them. Now, as I purpose, with the Lord's blessing and grace, to follow the history of Levi through all the Scriptures in which it is brought before us, I will commence with his birth, as recorded in Genesis 29: 34; "And she [Leah] conceived again, and bare a son: and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi" (that is, "joined").

Here, then, we are presented with the birth and name of this most remarkable character — a name of wondrous significance as looked at in connection with his after history, whether in nature's wild and lawless extravagance, in which we find him "joined" with his brother in the perpetration of a deed of blood and murder (Gen. 34), or in the day when he was called to drink deeply and largely of the cup of God's electing grace, when "joined" with Aaron in "the work of the tabernacle" (Num. 8).

Genesis 34: 25-26: "And it came to pass on *the third day*, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went out."

As the Spirit of God in Jacob has furnished us with a striking commentary on the above piece of cruelty, we will consider the Scripture in which the commentary is given, namely, Genesis 49: 5-7: "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."

We have here a truly humbling view of human nature as looked at in the light of the holiness of God. It is as if the Lord would say to us, Look here! behold a man clothed in nature's blackest garb, and presenting nature's most forbidding aspect. Examine him closely, in order that you, seeing what man is when stripped of all that false clothing which ignorance or vain self-righteousness would put upon him, may know the rich aboundings of My grace, which can avail to lift even such a one into the loftiest heights of communion — heights which human conception would utterly fail to mount, but which My grace, through the blood of the cross, can make available to the very chief of sinners.

In reading such a description as that which the above passage presents to us, how needful it is for the sinner to bear in mind that it is not only in the light of *God's holiness* that he is called to look at himself, but also in the light of *His grace*. When this is learned he needs not be afraid to penetrate deeply into the dark recesses of his heart's corruption; for if God in grace *fill* the scene, the sinner (so far as his own righteousness is concerned) must necessarily be *out* of the scene; and then it is no longer a question of what we think about sin, but how *God* will deal with it in grace, and that is simply to put it away forever — yea, to bury it forever in the waters of His forgetfulness: thus it will be placing our sin side by side with God's grace; which is what the gospel invites us to do, and which, moreover, is the only way to arrive at a proper settlement of the question of sin. On the other hand, where this saving principle is not known — not believed — the sinner will undoubtedly seek to make the load of his guilt as light as possible, in order that he may have as little to do as he may. This will ever lead to the most unutterable and

intolerable bondage; or if not to this, to that which is much worse, even to detestable religious pride, which is of all things most truly abominable in the sight of God.

Reader, if you have not as yet got the question of sin settled between your conscience and God, ponder, I do beseech you, what I have now stated; for to know this principle in spirit is life eternal. Christ has, *once for all*, borne sin's deepest curse in His own body on the tree, and now even *Levi* can lift up his head for although he be by nature only conversant with "*instruments of cruelty*," things which must have kept God forever at a distance from "his secret and his assembly;" although he be by nature cruel, *fierce, self-willed, scattered, and divided*, yet God can, in the exercise of His mercy, make him conversant with "the instruments of the tabernacle," bring him into the enjoyment of the covenant of *life and peace*, in union with the great head of the priestly family, and, in the power of this blessed union, cause him to have his "*lights and perfections with his Holy One*" (Deut. 33: 8; Mal 2: 4-5). However, we must not anticipate the teaching of passages which are yet to come under our notice; I will therefore close my remarks on this part of our subject by requesting my reader to compare attentively the character of Levi, as above recorded, with that which the Apostle Paul, quoting from the Psalms, has given of man generally whether Jew or Gentile: "There is *none* righteous, no, not one; there is *none* that understandeth, there is *none* that seeketh after God. They are *all* gone out of the way, they are *together* become unprofitable; there is *none* that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD: *destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known*: there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3: 10-18).

Exodus 32: 25-29 — "And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his

sword by his side and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that He may bestow upon you a blessing this day."

Here a new scene opens to us, and we are called to witness the dawning of a new day upon Levi; a day, moreover, which may justly lead us to anticipate great things. It is true we get him here likewise with his sword by his side, but, oh, for what a different purpose, and in what a different cause! It is not now in anger and self-will slaying a man, but in holy jealousy and care for the honour of the Lord God of Israel, and in simple obedience to His command; and although this; may, and will, lead to the very cutting off of a brother, a son, or a friend, Levi cares not; for the word is, "Consecrate yourselves to the Lord, that He may bestow upon you a blessing." This was enough for Levi; and although by nature he was vile and utterly unfit either for the fellowship or service of God, yet is he nor the foremost in jealous vindication of His holy name and worship against those who would seek to "turn their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass." Nor is Levi now seen "joined" with his brother Simeon — no he might join in league with him in the days of his wickedness for the perpetration of deeds of blood; but here, as I before observed, we get the opening of a new scene and therefore he is seen "joined" with the Lord and His servant Moses for the execution of righteous judgement upon idolatry.

And henceforth, in following the footsteps of Levi, we shall find that, instead of being "swift to shed blood," they are to be "swift in following the movements of the cloud, and, "swift" in performing the service of the tabernacle.

It would, of course, be quite foreign to our subject to dwell upon the sad and humbling scene that called out the above act of service on the part of Levi Suffice it to say that it was, as we know, on the part of Aaron and the camp, a ceasing to exercise faith in the fact that Moses was *alive* in the presence of God for them. The consequence of which was an entire forgetfulness of the mighty

Hand and stretched out Arm that had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, and of their present position *in the wilderness*; hence, as might be expected, "the people *sat down to eat and drink* and rose up to play." May the Lord preserve us from like forgetfulness; and, seeing "those things were written for our admonition," may we be truly admonished thereby not to "lust after evil things."

We shall now pass on to the next Scripture, where we get the Lord's own thoughts upon the above act of service, namely, Deuteronomy 33: 8-11: "And of Levi he [Moses] said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed Thy word and kept Thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob Thy judgements, and Israel Thy law; they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept I the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."

In this passage we have real Levite service brought before us in the words, "who said unto his father and mother, I have not seen him," etc. The true and decided servant of God will ever have to experience something of this; indeed, the measure thereof will just be in proportion to the faithfulness and power of his walk: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"; therefore every heir of that kingdom must show himself in "readiness to deny all the claims which "flesh and blood" would make on him, whether in himself or in others. Most happily does the address to "the queen," in Ps. 45, connect itself with this point: "*Harken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget e also thine own people* and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him" (vers. 10-11).

We have all to watch against a tendency to be influenced by the claims of flesh and blood, in our testimony for Christ. He Himself has said on this subject that "no man having put his hand to the plow and *looking back*, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9: 62). And, as some one has observed, it was upon this point that the prophet

Elisha's character seemed a little defective, for when Elijah cast his mantle over him, or, in other words, when he had put upon him the high honour of making him a prophet of the Lord God, Elisha's heart seemed to yearn after home, and he said, "Let me, I pray thee, *kiss my father and my mother*, and *then I will follow thee*" (1 Kings 19: 20). Now this was most natural, and, as some would say, amiable and affectionate; but, oh, amiability and natural affection have often hindered people from entering as they should into the Lord's service; and although it is one of the marks of the latter-day apostasy to be "without natural affection," yet does Moses, in the above-cited passage, ask the Lord to bless Levi, because "he said unto his father and his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children." How grossly inconsistent would it have been for Levi to have said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother," when called to enter upon the Lord's work; and not less so is it for us to allow the claims of "flesh and blood" to interfere with our true-hearted Levite service to our God, who has done so much for *us*.

But let us carefully observe the blessed consequences of this decision of character on the part of Levi. These are, first, "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgements, and Israel Thy law." Secondly, "They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar." Thirdly, "Bless his substance." Fourthly, "Accept the work of his hands." Fifthly, "Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." All these fruits are distinct, and yet intimately connected, as springing from the same source, namely, sample, devoted and uncompromising obedience to the Lord. As to the first of these fruits, how true it is that it is only the man who himself endeavours to walk in power before God that can speak with effect to the hearts and consciences of others; nothing else will do — nothing else will tell, either upon the hearts or in the lives of Christians. There may be, and, alas, is much of mere systematic teaching and preaching of things which the mere intellect may have received, and which, by a natural fluency of language, we may be able to give out; but all such teaching is vain, and had much better be avoided in the sight of God. True, it might often give to our public assemblies an appearance of barrenness and poverty which our poor, proud hearts could ill brook; but would it

not be far better to keep silence than to substitute mere carnal effort for the blessed energy of the Holy Spirit?

True ministry, however, the ministry of the Spirit, will always commend itself to the heart and conscience. We can always know the source from which a man is drawing who speaks in "the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth," and with the ability which God giveth; and while we should ever pray to be delivered from the mere effort of man's intellect to handle the truth of God amongst us, we should diligently cultivate that power to teach which stands connected, as in Levi's case, with the denial of the claims of flesh and blood, and with entire devotedness to the Lord's service.

In the second consequence above referred to we have a very elevated point: "They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar." This is worship. We put incense before God when we are enabled, in the power of communion, to present in His presence the sweet odour of Christ in His person and work. This is our proper occupation as members of the chosen and separated tribe.

But it is particularly instructive to look at both the above mentioned consequences in connection; i.e., the Levites in ministry to their brethren, and the Levites in worship before God: it was as acceptable in the sight of God, and as divine an exercise of his functions, for a Levite to instruct his brethren as it was for him to burn incense before God. This is very important. We should never separate these two things. If we do not see that it is the same Spirit who must qualify us to speak for God as to speak to Him, there is a manifest want of moral order in our souls. If we could keep this principle clearly before our minds, it would be a most effectual means of maintaining amongst us the true dignity and solemnity of ministry in the Word: having lost sight of it has been productive of very sad consequences. If we imagine for a moment that we can teach Jacob by any other power or ability than that by which we put incense before God, or if we imagine that one is not as acceptable before God as the other, we are not soundly instructed upon one of the most important points of truth; for, as some one has observed, "Let us look at this point illustrated in the personal ministry of Christ, and we shall no longer say that teaching by the Holy Ghost is

inferior to praise by the same, for surely the apostleship of Christ when He came *from God* was as sweet in its savour to God as His priesthood when *He went to God* to minister to Him in that office. The candlestick in the holy place which diffused the light of life — God's blessed name — was as valuable, at least in His view, as the altar in the same place, which presented the perfume of praise, whether of Christ personally, or of His body the church, for in both do we not equally see Christ."

We now come to speak of the third point, namely, "Bless, Lord, his substance." This is just what we might have expected; an increase of blessing will ever be the result of real true-hearted devotedness to Christ. "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit;" "The diligent soul shall be made fat;" and "To him that hath shall more be given." Levi had exhibited much diligence of soul in the Lord's service — he had shown himself in readiness to vindicate His name in strong and decided opposition to every mere human thought and affection; and now the Lord will show Levi that He is not unrighteous to forget his work and labour of love, "for He will bless his substance." We find the Apostle Paul bringing forward the same principle to his son Timothy when he tells him to "meditate on these things; *give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all* Here he connects the "profiting" with the "giving himself wholly": this will ever be the case; and if we would experience more than we do the meaning and power of the words, "Bless, Lord, his substance," we must first endeavour to enter into the meaning of what goes before, namely, "who said to his father and to his mother, I have not known him," etc. "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19: 29).

Not less striking is the connection between what has just been stated and our fourth point, namely, "Accept the work of his hands." This I conceive to be a point of the greatest importance to us, and one which involves a question upon which we frequently display much want of intelligence. We often find it difficult to reconcile the idea of salvation through free grace with that of an increase of

blessing and power for walking in obedience; and yet we find the two things constantly maintained in Scripture; thus we read, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and *will manifest Myself to him.*" And, again, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him" (John 14: 21, 23).

This is very clear and decided upon the subject: we see here that the manifestation of the Son is made to depend on our keeping the commandments of Christ. Grace takes up a sinner and leads him into the knowledge of the full forgiveness of his sins through faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ: but all this is simply a means to an end: it is, in a word, to set him down in a position of responsibility to Christ, which position he by nature could never have sustained, because "the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." If, then, a man be put into a place of responsibility It is clear that the more faithfully and diligently he maintains that place, the more enlarged will be his communion.

A father may have two children, the one obedient, the other the very reverse; now, they are both his children; neither the obedience of the one nor the disobedience of the other can interfere in the least with the relationship existing between them; but can we have a question as to which of them would enjoy most of the father's presence and affection? Surely not; a father likes to be obeyed, and will love the obedient child. There may be extraordinary cases where, from a warped judgement or a blind and unmeaning partiality, the disobedient, lawless son may have more of the heart of the parent than the other; but this is not so with God: His judgement is clear and unerring: He can accurately distinguish between the one that honours Him and the one that despises Him: the former "He will honour," the latter He will "lightly esteem." The Lord does not ask a sinner *dead* in trespasses and sins to serve Him, for all such a one could do would be polluted with sin — his very prayers are polluted — his meditations are polluted — his acts of benevolence are polluted; in a word, he is all polluted, from the crown of his head to

the sole of his foot, and therefore can do nothing acceptable in the sight of God. But the Lord quickens those that are dead in trespasses and sins, and then teaches them to "walk worthy of Him as dear children," and to be fruitful in every good word and work, to the praise of His name: and when we do this He graciously condescends to "accept the work of our hands." But not only does Scripture abound with precepts which confirm what has been above stated, it also affords numerous examples and illustrations of the same; thus, for instance, the case of Abraham and Lot, in the opening of the book of Genesis. These were both servants of God, but yet how differently they walked! one loved God; the other loved the well-watered plains of Sodom: and the consequence was, that while the Lord Himself could meet with Abraham, and sup with him, and, moreover, unfold to him His counsels with reference to Sodom, He merely sends angels to Sodom, and we can plainly perceive in their manner toward Lot their marked disapproval of his circumstances, for when he invites them into his house, they reply, "*Nay, but we will abide in the street all night.*"

This is plain: the angels of the Lord would rather abide all night in the streets of guilty Sodom than go in to a child of His who was not walking in obedience; nor does the fact that they afterwards consented to go in at all interfere with the point which I am seeking to establish; no, their answer speaks volumes of the most solemn and practical instruction to us; they enter into *Lot's house*, it is true; but if they do, it is only to counteract the sad effects of *Lot's sin*. May we, then, seek, by prayer and communion with God, to keep ourselves in the path of obedience, so that we may prove in our soul's happy experience the meaning of the prayer in our text, "Accept the work of his hands."

We have now arrived at the fifth and last point in this branch of our subject, namely, "Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." This is properly the last point, when there shall be neither "adversary nor evil occurrent" "we shall rest from our labour and conflict, and enter into possession of that upon which hope now feeds; therefore, when it can be said of our enemies "that they rise not again," we shall be happy indeed.

However, there is much of practical value in this point in the connection in which it stands here, i.e., as a *consequence* of obedience; there is nothing that gives the soul such marvellous power over enemies as an obedient, holy walk. Christ has conquered the devil, the death and hell, and He has moreover crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts, and therefore when a soul believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he is introduced at once into a place where he has Satan, the world, and the flesh under his feet; and it is as he walks in the power of resurrection life, that he can at all maintain this, his blessed ground. But alas! how often does it happen that instead of having all these *our* enemies under our feet, we are found under their feet, to the gross dishonour of our Lord, and the sorrow and debility of our own souls, and why, but because we walk not in simple obedience.

Every step we take in real obedience to Christ is, so far, a victory gained over the flesh, and the devil; and every fresh victory ministers fresh power for the conflict which follows; thus we grow. And on the other hand, every battle *lost* only serves to weaken us, while it gives power to our enemies to attack us again. Thus we see that the man whose heart is truly devoted to the Lord will have power to teach — power to worship; he will increase in substance, for Christ causes those that love Him "to inherit *substance*" (Prov. 8). He will enjoy more of God's favour and of the light of His countenance, for "them that honour Me I will honour"; and, finally, he will have enlarged power over all enemies. All these are the fruits of that true Levite devotedness which will enable a man to say "to his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him"; or, in other words, those fruits can only be enjoyed by one who is ready to "leave all and follow Christ." This being the case, then, we can have little difficulty in accounting for the poverty in gifts of ministry — the poverty in worship — the meagreness of growth — the many interruptions in the enjoyment of divine favour — the almost total lack of power over enemies of which we have all to complain. Many seek to satisfy themselves by saying that we cannot expect the same power in gifts and worship now as that which fell to the lot of the saints in the apostolic day, and this, of course, we are not going to deny; but then, the question is, Have we as much power and freshness in these things as we might have? I believe we have not —

and why? Is not Levi's God our God? Yes, He is, blessed be His name, and the same everlasting and abundant fountain of blessing as ever He was, but we, alas, are *far behind* in the matter of Levi's true devotedness; and this is the root of it all, for it remains unalterably true that "to him that hath shall more be given," and "we cannot serve two masters." This is true — solemn — and practical.

We are now called to consider a Scripture which will unfold to us at once the wondrous secret of how a sinner so degraded as Levi could hold a place of such elevation and nearness to God as that which he afterwards Occupied. There is nothing in a sinner by nature with which God could hold any intercourse; therefore, if ever He brings any one into a place of blessing and high communion, He does so in *pure grace*, and thus *excludes* "boasting" altogether, for "no flesh shall glory in His presence." Those who look upon it as presumption in a sinner to speak of holding a place of such nearness to God, seem to lose sight of this completely. It could never be *pride* that would lead any one into a place where he would be broken to pieces, and be shown that he was altogether corrupt and worthless; if God were to elevate *flesh*, and bring flesh into a place of nearness to Himself, then indeed there would be some force in the objection on the ground of presumption; but God does no such thing: the flesh is so far gone in ruin that it cannot be improved, and therefore God declares in the Cross His mind about the flesh, namely, that it is a condemned thing; but He, by the same Cross, gives the poor sinner *life*, and in the power of *that life*, and not in the power of life in the flesh, He brings the sinner into His presence and sets him down at His table; so that it is not the presumption of a poor prodigal that assigns the place which he is to occupy, but the *grace* and boundless loving kindness of the father: thus, God says to Noah, "The end of all flesh is come before Me," and what then? "Make thee an ark of gopher wood" — and in that ark is Noah raised up beyond the region of judgement, and a judged world, into a place of undisturbed communion. Now, we shall find the very same principles developed in God's dealings with Levi, in the Scripture which is about to engage our attention. I shall first consider their cleansing; and secondly, their position and service. First, their cleansing as recorded in

Numbers 8: 5-14:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, even fine flour mingled with oil; and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering. And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together: and thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites: and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the Lord. And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the Lord, to make an atonement for the Levites. And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the Lord. Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be Mine."

This passage furnishes us with a very rich and blessed branch of our interesting subject. We were enabled to see, in looking at Levi by nature, that such was his character that God would have no fellowship with him whatever, and that, so far as Levi was concerned, he should abide forever in *his own habitation*, in company with the "instruments of cruelty" which were therein. But God will not leave him there, and therefore God must Himself provide the remedy — God Himself must cleanse this self-willed, cruel and fierce man. And here we are invited to recall a thought which occurred to the mind in the opening of this paper, viz., that man's sin must ever be brought into the presence of God's grace. Levi had nothing else to look to; his sin was such as to preclude every thought of human remedy; the law condemned Levi's nature; and God had pronounced him unfit for His presence. And what, then, had Levi to do? Could he set himself with heart and soul to keep the law? Impossible: the law had not only condemned his

works, but pronounced the curse of God upon his very nature. The law said, "Thou shalt do no murder" and having said this, it added, "*Cursed* is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." But Levi had murder in his nature, therefore Levi's nature was cursed.

What, then, could Levi do? Might he not cast himself over upon the mercy of God with the hope that He would deal lightly with his sins? No; by no means: God had given forth His solemn and unalterable decree, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret"; God could not come into a habitation wherein were "instruments of cruelty."

Thus, then, Levi was completely shut up without a single means of escape; the law nailed him down to this one point, "Answer my demands." And all that Levi had towards the discharge of these demands was, "anger, fierceness, murder, self-will, cruelty," etc.: poor resources, alas! Nor would the law of God enter into any composition with the sinner; it should have "the uttermost farthing," or else the word was, "*cursed art thou*." Therefore Levi, *as a man alive in the flesh*, or, in other words, Levi, as seeking to get life through the law, was judged, condemned, and set aside, and it only remained for him to take thus the place of *one dead*, in order that God might *in grace* quicken him into new life, which God was ready and willing to do, and which, as we shall see, He graciously did, according to His own marvellous thoughts, and in His own way.

{The reader will, of course, bear in mind that what is stated the believer now knows in reality through the Holy Ghost.}

Levi, then, had just to see himself as one that was, in God's account, *dead*, as we read "for they [i.e., the Levites] are wholly given unto Me from among the children of Israel; *instead* of such as open every womb, even *instead* of the first-born of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto Me: for all the first-born of the children of Israel are Mine both man and beast: on the day that I smote every first-born in the land of Egypt, *I sanctified them for Myself; and I have taken the Levites for all the first-born of the children of Israel*" (Num. 8: 16-18).

The Lord passed through the land of Egypt with the sword of justice unsheathed, to smite all the first-born, nor would Israel's first-born have escaped, had not the sword fallen upon the neck of the spotless victim and thus, as some one has beautifully observed, "There was death in every house, not only in the houses of the Egyptians, but also in those of the Israelites: in the former, it was the *death of Egypt's first-born*; in the latter, the death of God's LAMB."

The Levites, then, were taken *instead* of those upon whom the sword of the destroying about Levi in this paper is to be regarded as typical of that which angel should have fallen; or, in other words, *the Levites were, typically a dead and risen people*, and thus were no longer looked at in the circumstances of nature, but of *new life* through grace, in which they were placed by God Himself. And here let me observe that this is the path which every sinner must travel if he would know experimentally anything of Levi's after history. There is no other way in which to escape from the judgement of the law on the one hand, or from the horrid workings of indwelling corruption on the other, than simply to see ourselves "dead" to both, and "alive unto God through Jesus Christ." "How shall we," says the apostle, "that are *dead to sin* live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6: 2-4). And, again, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become *dead to the law* by the body of Christ, that ye should be *married to another*, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7: 4). But not only are death and resurrection the only possible means by which a sinner can escape the condemnation of the law and the tyrannical sway of sin, they are also the only means by which he can acceptably serve God. The flesh, or carnal mind, cannot serve God, for it is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be; therefore we infer that the sources of that life by which we can serve God are not to be found in the flesh, but only in union with the Lord Jesus in resurrection. "If a man abide not *in Me*, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered" (John 15: 6). Consequently, when God would bring Levi into a place of nearness and service to Himself, He shows him to us as passing through those

circumstances which, in the clearest manner, illustrate *death and resurrection*; for they are taken instead of those that were as dead, but who escaped. through the death of the lamb: and then having thus passed through the circumstances of death, they are told in chap. 8 to "*put off the old man and put on the new*" for that is the meaning of the "washing of water," and "shaving of the flesh," etc. This is in full keeping with what the apostle states to his son Titus: "For we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, *living in malice and envy*, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the *washing of regeneration*, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3: 3-6).

But in order that we may have a clearer and more comprehensive view of the ground upon which the Levites stood before God, I would refer, in as brief and concise a manner as I can, to the offerings connected with their consecration: these were the burnt offering, the meat offering, and the sin offering; all, as we shall see, showing out the Lord Jesus Christ in His varied aspects.* And first, the burnt offering: the principles unfolded in this offering are brought out in the first chapter of Leviticus, where we read, "If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord" (ver. 3).

{*It may be well just to observe here that in considering the offerings above referred to I have merely looked at them with reference to the question of Levi's history}

Here, then, is something real for the soul to feed on and rejoice in. We have in the burnt offering the Lord Jesus Christ, in all His fullness and perfections, as offering Himself "*without spot to God*," and also as accepted before God *for us*. In this He was found to be "*a male without blemish*"; so much so, that the One in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, could say, "In whom I am well pleased": and again, "Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth."

But further, this unblemished offering presents Himself voluntarily at the door of the tabernacle. "No man," says the Lord Jesus, speaking of His life, "taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again: this commandment have I received of My Father." And truly, in tracing the way of the blessed Jesus through this defiled world, we can recognise this feature of the burnt offering in a very striking manner. From first to last His course was marked with all the steadiness and divine uninterrupted calmness of true devotedness to God. The billows of dark and fierce temptation might roll and toss themselves with a range and fury which would have crushed one less than God. The devil might stir up all his deadly malice against Him; man might display all his enmity — enmity which could only be outdone by the eternal friendship of this devoted One. His disciples, moreover, may refuse to "watch with Him one hour." Death may arm himself with all his ghastly terrors, and pour out a cup mixed with hell's bitterest ingredients; and further, display his deadly sting in all its infernal keenness and power to wound. The grave may conjure up all its unutterable horrors to make one grand struggle for "*victory*," but *all* in vain. The answer of this unblemished voluntary offering to all these was, "My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." He had His eye upon one object, and that was "the joy that was set before Him." He looked forward to the moment when He would be able to draw forth from the inexhaustible treasures of eternal love the rich and princely fruits of His hard-bought victory, and pour them forth in divine profusion upon the "travail of His soul"; even the Church, which He loved, and purchased with His own precious blood. He eagerly anticipated "the morning without clouds," when, surrounded by the myriads of His ransomed brethren, He will sound forth in everlasting strains the mighty answer to all the foul aspersions of the enemy as to the love of God toward the sinner. All these attractions, I say, He had before Him, and therefore He marched onward in the greatness of His strength; He *steadfastly* set His face to go to Jerusalem." Lord Jesus Christ, invigorate our poor cold hearts to sound forth the eternal honours of Thine adorable name; and may our lives be more and more the decided evidence of our hearts — love to Thee, for "Thou alone art worthy!" All this is surely most blessed for us; but, blessed as it is, it is not all; there are

other strokes from the pencil of the Divine Artist, calculated, in the highest degree, to captivate our spiritual tastes, yea, more, to feed our souls. "He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and *it shall be accepted for him*, to make atonement for him" (ver. 4). Here, then, is grace! Levi, the self-willed, cruel, fierce, and blood-shedding Levi, is accepted in all the perfectness and acceptableness of this "unblemished male" before God: whatever of excellency, whatever of value, whatever of purity, God beheld in this offering, that did He likewise behold in Levi as "accepted in the offering." Thus, look at Levi *apart from* the offering, and you will find him such that God could not come into *his* assembly: but look at him as *in the offering*, and you find him, through grace, as pure and as perfect as the offering itself. Nothing could surpass this most excellent grace. The grace that could take up a sinner from such a pit of corruption as that in which Levi lay grovelling, and lead him into such high elevation, deserves the highest note of praise; and, blessed be God, it shall, ere long, have it from all who, like Levi, have felt its sacred power.

However, we must not enter too minutely into the detail of this burnt offering, and there are just two points further to which I will refer. The first is presented to us in ver. 6: "And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces." Here we see at once to what a process of strict, jealous and uncompromising scrutiny the Lord Jesus exposed Himself in offering Himself before God. It was not enough that the animal should be APPARENTLY "without blemish," for the skin, or *outward surface*, might look very well, and at the same time the offering be not at all fit for God's altar; therefore the *outward surface* must be removed, in order that this offering may be examined in all its sinews, joints and veins, and thus be found, as to *the springs of action, the structure of his frame*, and the source and channels of the life that animated him, a perfectly unblemished offering. But further, "*he shall cut it into his pieces*," i.e., take the offering asunder, and examine its various parts, in order that it may not only form a perfect whole, but that each distinct joint may be found perfect. Thus, in whatever aspect we look at the Lord Jesus, we get divine perfection. He could say to God, "Thou hast tried Me, and shalt find nothing;" and God could answer, "I am well pleased." He could say of the devil, "The prince of this world

cometh, and hath nothing *in Me*;" and the devil could reply, "I know Thee, who thou art, *the Holy One of God*." He could say to men, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" and man could answer, "Truly this was a *righteous man*." Thus, I say, our divine burnt offering, who voluntarily presented Himself at God's altar, and there poured forth His most precious blood, was found, in every feature and in every aspect, pure and perfect in the very highest sense of the word, and confessed so by heaven, earth, and hell.

{We may also observe, in the act of cutting the offering into his pieces, this important truth, that in whatever relationship of life we contemplate the Lord Jesus, we find the same unsullied perfection whether we consider Him as a public or as a private character, in one position or another, all is alike. Not so with man — here there must be failure in one way or another. If a man is a good public character, he may be the very plague of the family circle, and vice versa. And, surely, in all this we learn the glorious truth which shall shortly be owned by all created intelligences, that "He alone is worthy."}

All, therefore, having been found pure, and fit for God's altar, it becomes the happy place of *Aaron's sons* to send up before God the sweet savour of this most acceptable offering, as we read: "And the *sons of Aaron* the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire. And *the priests*, *Aaron's sons*, shall lay the parts, the head and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar. But his *inwards and his legs* shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord" (vers. 7-9).

The fat of the offering was God's peculiar part; no one could with impunity touch that; yea, the punishment for so doing was the same as for eating blood; i.e., it was as wrong and as daringly presumptuous for a man to intrude upon God's portion of the offering as it was for him to assume life in his own right, which latter was an open denial of the state of death and ruin in which he was by reason of sin. God, then, I say, claimed the fat. He alone could feed upon the inward excellency and peerless perfections of Jesus, just as in the case of the unmeasured ointment in Exodus 30, where we see, as well as in the above cited passage, that the infinite

mind of God could alone appreciate the infinite value of Christ. But we find *the head* burnt in connection with the fat, showing us, I suppose, that both the hidden energies of the Lord Jesus and the seat of His understanding were equally suited to be a sweet savour unto God. Lastly, the inwards and legs were washed and burned upon the altar, showing us that the secret thoughts, purposes and counsels of the Lord Jesus, as well as the outward development of these in His walk, were perfectly pure and fit for the altar: and, in connection with this last point, one cannot help dwelling with comfort upon the marvellous contrast between the Lord Jesus and His poor people. How often may our *outward walk*, typified by "the legs," appear quite right in the eye of man, when, at the same time, perhaps, in the eye of God, our "*inwards*" may be full of gross impurity. But it is well for us that such was not the case with our great Head: in Him all was alike, for all was pure. May our hearts enter more and more fully, under the teaching of the Spirit, into the intrinsic excellency of the Lord Jesus; and may we be enabled daily, standing at the altar before God, to send up in His presence the savour of all this!

As to the meat offering, we need not enter minutely into it. It was composed, as we know, of that which sprang from the *earth*, and such as aptly shadowed out "the Man Christ Jesus, the frankincense thereon marking the entire devotedness of all the actings of Christ's human nature to God His Father. Nothing was done by Him to meet man's eye, or man's approbation; nothing was done to produce mere effect; no, *all was directly before God*. Whether we trace the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, while, for thirty years, *He was subject* to His parents at home; or while, for three years, He was engaged in public ministry amongst the Jews — all was alike: all showed forth the pure frankincense that marked Him, in all things, as God's peculiar and devoted servant. We may observe further that this meat offering was *baked* with oil, and *anointed* with oil; thus showing forth, I suppose, the incarnate Son of God, who was first "*conceived* of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1: 20), and then "*anointed* with the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 3: 16; Acts 10: 38).

We now come to speak of the sin offering, and may the Lord graciously refresh our spirits while dwelling for a little on the blessed principles unfolded therein. The sin offering is brought

before us in Leviticus 4, from whence we may select one case for our present purpose. "If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people, then *let him bring* for his sin which he hath sinned a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering. And *he shall bring* the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord, and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head and kill the bullock before the Lord" (vers. 3-4).

The reader will, no doubt, observe a marked difference between the above passage and that in which the burnt offering was referred to; and the difference so far mainly consists in this, that in the last cited passage the words "*voluntary will*" are not found, and this was quite to be looked for. In the burnt offering we were enabled to recognise the Lord Jesus Christ *offering* Himself voluntarily before God, in which aspect of His blessed work He could say, "No man taketh it [My life] from Me, *I lay it down of Myself*." In other words, He offered Himself "of His own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord." But in the sin offering it is quite different: "*He shall be brought*" and "*He shall be killed*", i.e., instead of *coming*, *He shall be brought*; and instead of laying down His life *of Himself*, His life *shall be taken from Him*. These, I say, are important distinctions, and such as arise from the very nature of the two offerings. In the burnt offering the Lord Jesus is seen offering Himself in all the unblemished perfectness which belonged to Him; and in this His soul had great delight, because He was presenting that before God which was so acceptable to Him. But in the sin offering the Lord Jesus is seen standing in connection with that which His pure and spotless soul must have deeply abhorred and keenly resented — abhorred and resented, indeed, in a way of which we cannot form the faintest idea. He is seen, in a word, as standing in connection with *sin*: yea, more, as "*made sin*" (2 Cor. 5: 21). *Thus* it was that the prophet, through the Spirit, viewed Him when he said, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with *His stripes* we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53: 5-6).

Now I believe that by looking at the two offerings in connection we get a very deep and wondrous view of sin's dark and dreadful enormity in the sight of God: for sin in this point of view appears sinful just according to the measure of Christ's perfectness in God's account. If in the burnt offering we were enabled to see that such was the beauty and excellency of Christ that His whole man could go up before God as a sweet savour, and that God could "find nothing in Him" but perfection, as a necessary consequence then we must see in the sin offering the blackness and heinousness of sin, which could oblige God to hide His face from "His elect, in whom His soul delighted."

This brings us to the next point connected with the sin offering, viz., "He shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head" (ver. 4). Here we have at once the secret of the deep and profound mystery of the three hours' darkness.

It was before observed that God had to hide His face from the Lord Jesus on the cross, but how are we to account for such a mysterious circumstance? Simply by the words, "he (the sinner) shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head." If, in contemplating the burnt offering, we were struck by the fact that all the perfectness of the offering was communicated to the "fierce and cruel" Levi, so here we are called upon to adore the grace that devised the wondrous plan whereby that could be effected, which was by imputing to the offering all the sin and defilement of Levi, and dealing with the sin of Levi in the person of the sin offering, in order that Levi himself might be dealt with in the person of the burnt offering.

And all this, be it observed, is conveyed to us in the action of "the laying on of hands." This action was performed in both cases; i.e., Levi laid his hands on the head of the burnt-offering, and Levi laid his hands on the head of the sin offering. As to the act, it was the same in each case; but oh, how different the results! they were, in a word, as different as life and death, Heaven and hell, sin and holiness. In fact, we cannot conceive a wider contrast than that which is observable in the results of this action, to all appearance the same in each case. We may, perhaps, be able to form some idea of it by considering that the act of imposition of hands was at once the imputation of *sin* to one "*who knew no sin,*" but was "*holy,*

harmless, undefiled," and whose very nature abhorred *all sin*. And, on the other hand, it was the imputation of *perfect righteousness* to one who was by nature "a cruel, fierce, and self-willed murderer"* Furthermore, the act of all worlds dwelt in the bosom of the Father to travel far away into the cold and barren regions of death and darkness, where the genial and life-giving rays of His Father's countenance, which He alone could truly appreciate, had never penetrated; and standing upon the confines of which, He cried "*If it be possible*, let this cup pass from Me!" and again, when these gloomy regions, with their ten thousand unutterable horrors, burst upon His spotless soul, "My God, My God WHY HAST THOU forsaken Me?"

{*I would observe here that in speaking of "the imputation of righteousness," I by no means desire to be understood as giving any countenance to the prevailing theory of "the imputed righteousness of Christ." Of this expression, so much in use in the theology of the present day, it would be sufficient to say that it is nowhere to be found in the oracles of God. I read of "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 3 passim), and, moreover, of the imputation of righteousness (Rom. 4: 11), but never of "the righteousness of Christ." It is true, we read of the Lord Jesus being "*made of God* unto us righteousness" (Jer. 23: 6), but these, passages do not support the above theory. I would further add that the moral effect of this idea will be found to be decidedly pernicious because it *of necessity* supposes the believer as standing apart from the Lord Jesus, whereas the doctrine of Scripture is that the believer is "made the righteousness of God IN HIM " (2 Cor. 5: 21). And again, "we are in Him that is true, even in *His Son Jesus Christ*" (1 John 5: 20).}

And, on the other hand, it enabled the one who dwelt in "the habitations of cruelty," into whose "assembly" God could not come, to stand in the very blaze of the light of God's throne These considerations, I say, may perhaps assist our conceptions in some measure upon this astounding truth. Now, he apostle states the same truth in the didactic language of the New Testament when he says, "He [God] hath *made Him* to be *sin for us*, that *we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor. 5: 21). That is, He hath made the One whose perfectness is seen in the burnt offering to be

judged *as sin*, and treated as such in the sin offering in order that *we*, who deserved the treatment of the sin offering, might be created as accepted in the burnt offering.

I would also observe here that there is much force and value in the word "*made*" it shows out most fully that righteousness was just as foreign to the nature of man as sin was to the nature of Christ. Man had no righteousness of his own, or in other words, he knew no righteousness, and therefore he had to be "*made*" righteousness. Christ "*knew no sin*," and therefore had to be "*made sin*" in order that we might be *made* righteousness, even "the righteousness of God *in Him*." But further, we learn from the passage to which we are referring that the Lord Jesus having been "*made sin for us*," is not more real, not more true, not more palpable, than that the believer is "*made righteousness in Him*."

If there be any truth or reality in the record concerning the cross and passion of the Lord Jesus, then, it is plain that the moment a soul acts in faith upon Christ in His death and resurrection, that moment he is accepted in all the acceptableness of Christ. His consciousness of this is, of course, quite another question: a truth and the realisation of a truth are quite distinct.

The measure of our realisation will be in proportion to the measure of our communion with God. If we are satisfied to move at a cold and heartless distance from God, our consciousness of the power and value of any truth will, as a consequence, be meagre and shallow: while, therefore, it is not to be forgotten that the root and source of all life and communion is the truth stated in the passage to which we are alluding, it is manifest that the more we walk in communion with Him who gives us the life, the more shall we enjoy both Himself and the life which He gives. Dear Christian reader, let us pray that the cross and passion of the Lord Jesus may sink so deeply into our hearts that we may have on the one hand such a view of the loathsomeness of sin as shall lead us to abhor it with a holy abhorrence "all the days of our life," and on the other hand such a view of the amazing love of God as shall constrain us "to live not unto ourselves but unto Him who died for us and rose again."

Thus, then, we see that the laying on of hands shows forth nothing less than a *change of places* on the part of the sinner and the Saviour. The sinner was *out* of the favour of God: "O my soul, come not thou into their habitation." The Saviour was *in* the favour of God, "*daily His delight*," dwelling in His bosom from before all worlds. But the amazing plan of redemption *shows us the Saviour out of the favour of God, and God forsaking Him, while at the same time a condemned malefactor is brought at once into the very presence of a loving and pardoning God*. Amazing, deep, inconceivable, eternal love! unfathomable wisdom! love which soars far aloft above the most gigantic conception! wisdom which has written everlasting contempt upon all the power and base designs of the great enemy of God and man! For, ere Levi could be introduced into the enjoyment of the "covenant of *life and peace*" (Mal. 2: 5), a spotless Victim must stand the shock of the king of terrors and all his thunders. But who is this Victim? We ask not, "Who is this King of glory?" but Who is this Victim? The answer to this question it is which gives to the plan of redemption its grandest and most divine characteristic. The Victim was none less than the Son of God Himself! Yes! here was love, here was wisdom. The Son of God had to stoop because man had exalted himself. And surely we may say, If God had not entered upon the work, *all, all* were lost, and that forever. No mere mortal could have entered into that dark scene where sin was being atoned for; no one but the Son of God could have sustained the weight which, in the garden and on the cross, rested on the shoulders of the "One that was mighty." And here we might refer to the Lord's language to His disciples when He was about to enter into conflict with the adversary: "Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14: 30). Why could He not "talk much with them"? Because He was just going to enter upon the work of atonement, in which they could do nothing, because the prince of this world, had he come, would have had plenty in them, but then, the moment He, as it were, in spirit passes through that sorrowful hour, He says, "Arise, let us go hence"; i.e., although we could not move a single step in the achievement of the victory, yet we could enjoy the fruits of it; and not only so, but display the fruits of it in a life of service and fruit-bearing to God, which forms the subject of teaching in the next chapter.

Here, then, is what gives peace to the awakened conscience of the sinner. God Himself has done the work. God has triumphed over all man's wickedness and rebellion, and now every soul who feels his need of pardon and peace can draw near in faith and holy confidence and reap the fruits of this wondrous triumph of grace and mercy.

And now, dear reader, if you have not as yet made these wondrous fruits your own; if you have not as yet cast the whole burden of your sins on God's eternal love as seen in the cross, I ask you, Why do you stand aloof? Why do you doubt? Perhaps you feel the hardness of your heart, perhaps you are ready to say that you feel yourself even now unmoved by the contemplation of all the deep sorrow endured by the Son of God. Well, what of that? If it be a question of *your* guilt, you may go much farther than even this, for in that hour of which we have been speaking you stood unmoved, looked on with cold and heartless indifference, while all creation owned the wondrous fact. Yea, more, you yourself crucified the incarnate God, you spat in His face, and plunged your spear into His side. Do you shrink back and say, "Oh, not so bad!" I say *it was the act of the human heart*; and if you have a human heart, it was your act. But the Scriptures at once decide this point, for it is written, "For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, *with the Gentiles* and the people of Israel, were gathered together" (Acts 4: 27). This passage, I say, proves that all the world were *representatively* around the cross. But why insist on this? Simply to show forth the riches of the grace of God, which can only be seen in all its effulgent lustre in the cross; and therein it is seen mounting far above all man's sin and malignant rebellion; for when man, in the fiendish pride of his heart, could plunge his ; spear into the side of incarnate Deity, God's cry was — BLOOD! and through that blood "*remission of sins, beginning at Jerusalem.*" A Thus, where *sin* abounded, *grace* did *much more abound*," and "grace REIGNS through righteousness by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Enough, I trust, has been said to show the grounds upon which the Levites stood before God. These grounds were free and *eternal grace* — grace exercised toward them through the blood, which is

the only channel through which grace can flow. Man has been found to be *utterly ruined* before God, and therefore it must be a question either of salvation through free grace, or eternal damnation; for by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified." But then, while man is by nature utterly unfit to render anything like an acceptable righteousness or service to God, yet, when God gives us *new life* through grace, He, of course, looks for the development of that life. In other words, grace brings the soul into circumstances of responsibility and service, and it is as we meet those circumstances that God is glorified in us and our souls grow in the knowledge of God. Thus it was in the case of the leper: up to a certain point in his history had nothing to do, the priest was the sole actor. But when the priest had done his part; when, by virtue of the blood which had been shed, he had pronounced him "clean," the leper had then to begin to "wash himself" (Lev. 14: 8). Now we shall find that the history of Levi develops all these principles most fully.

We have hitherto been engaged with Levi's condition and character by nature and also the wondrous remedy devised by grace to meet him in his lost estate, and not only to save him *from* that estate but also to raise him up to an elevation which could never have entered into the heart of man, even into the very tabernacle of God. We shall now, with God's blessing and grace, proceed to examine that high elevation to which we have referred, and also the service which it involved, as put before us in

Numbers 3:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron, and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel" (verse 5-9).

Here, then, God's marvellous purposes of grace toward Levi fully open before us, and truly marvellous they are indeed. We see

that the sacrifices were but a means to an end; but both the means and the end were in every way worthy of each other. The means were, in one word, "death and resurrection," *and all included therein*. The end was, *nearness to God, and all included therein*.

Looking at Levi by nature, there could not be any point farther removed from God than that at which he stood; but *grace* in exercise, through the blood, could *lift him up* out of that ruin in which he stood, and "bring him nigh," yea, bring him into association with the great head of the priestly family, there to serve in the tabernacle. Thus, we read, "You *hath He quickened who were dead* in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.... *But God*, who is *rich in mercy*, for His *great love* wherewith *He loved us*, even *when we were dead in sins*, hath quickened us *together with Christ* (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 1-6). And again, "*But now, in Christ Jesus*, ye who sometime were *afar off*, are *made nigh* by the blood of Christ" (ver. 13).

When *nature* is left free to work, it will ever go as far away from God as it can. This is true since the day when man said "I heard *Thy voice*, and I was *afraid* and I hid myself" (Gen. 3: 10). But when *grace* is left free and sovereign to work, it will ever *bring* the soul "nigh." Thus it was with Levi. He was by nature "*black as the tents of Kedar*"; by grace, "comely as the curtains of Solomon": by *nature* he was "*joined*" in a covenant of murder; by grace "*joined*" in a covenant of "life and peace." The former, because he was "*fierce and cruel*"; the latter, because he feared and was afraid of the Lord's name. (Cp. Gen. 49: 6-7; Mal. 2: 5). Furthermore, Levi was by *nature* conversant with the "instruments of cruelty"; by *grace*, with "*the instruments of God's tabernacle*: by *nature* God could not come into *Levi's assembly*; by *grace*, Levi is brought into *God's assembly*: by nature "his feet were swift to *shed blood* ". by grace, *swift* to follow the movements of the cloud through the desert, in real, patient service to God. In a word, Levi had become a "*new creature*," and "old things had passed away," and therefore he was

no longer to "live unto himself," but unto Him who had done such marvellous things for him in grace.

I would further observe, on the last cited passage, that the Levies are, in the first place, declared to be God's property, and then they are " WHOLLY GIVEN UNTO AARON. "Thus we read: "*Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me*, and they have kept Thy word" (John 17: 6). And again, "All that *the Father giveth Me* shall come to Me" (John 6: 37).

I would now look a little into the detail of their service, in which, I doubt not, we shall find much to edify and refresh us.

We find that although the whole tribe of Levi were, *as to standing*, "*joined with Aaron*," yet, as to *service*, they were divided into classes. "All had not the same office;" and this is what we might have expected, for, although in the matter of *life* and *standing* they were all *on a level*, yet, in the development of that life, and in the manifestation of the power of that standing, they would, no doubt, display different measures; and not only so, but there would also be seen an assignment to each of distinct position and line of service, which would serve to distinguish him from his brethren in a very marked and decided manner. And here I would observe that I know of nothing connected with the walk and service of the Christian which demands more attention than this point to which I am now alluding, viz., unity in the matter of life and standing, and at the same time the greatest variety in the manifestation of character and in the line of service. A due attention to this important point would save us from much of that "unwise" comparing of ourselves and our service with the persons and services of others, which is most unholy, and, as a consequence, most unhealthy.* And not only would it lead thus to beneficial results in a negative point of view, it would also have a most happy effect in producing and cultivating originality and uniqueness of Christian character. But while there was this diversity in the line of service amongst the Levites, it is also to be remembered that there was *manifested unity*. The Levites were one people, and seen as such; they were "*joined*" with Aaron in the work of the tabernacle; moreover, THEY HAD ONE STANDARD, round which they all rallied, and that was "the tabernacle of the congregation," the well known type of Christ in His character and

offices. And, indeed, this was one of the ends which God had in view in calling out the Levites by His grace from amongst the people of Israel; it was that they should stand in marked association with Aaron and his sons, and in that association bear the tabernacle and all pertaining thereto on their shoulders, through the barren wilderness around.**

{*It is worthy the serious attention of the Christian reader who may desire the unity of the Church, that the tribe of Levi in the desert was a truly striking example of what may be termed "unity in diversity." Gershon was in one sense totally different from Merari, and Merari was totally different from Kohath; and yet Gershon, Merari and Kohath were one: they should not, therefore, contend about their service, because they were *one*; nor yet would it have been right to confound their services, because they were totally different. Thus, attention to *unity* would have saved them from contention, and attention to *diversity* would have saved them from confusion. In a word, all things could only be "done decently and in order" by a due attention to the fact of there being "unity in diversity."}

{**I say "one of the ends," for we should ever remember that the grand object before the divine mind in redemption is to show in the ages to come His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus; and this object will be secured even though our poor puny services had never been heard of.}

God did not call out the Levites merely that they might escape the sad effects of God's absence from their assembly; or, in other words, God had more than their blessing and security in view in His dealings with them. He designed that they should serve in the tabernacle, and thus be to His praise and glory. We shall, however, I trust, see this principle upon which I am dwelling in a clearer and stronger point of view as we proceed in our subject.

We find that Levi had three sons, viz., "Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari" (Num. 3: 17). These formed the heads of the three classes alluded to, and we shall find that the nature of the service of each was such as of necessity to impart that tone of character signified by their very name. Thus: "Of Gershon was the family of

the Libnites and the family of the Shimites: these are the families of the Gershonites. And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph, the son of Lael. And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof" (ver. 21-26).

Here was Gershon's work, to carry through the waste and howling wilderness the tabernacle and its coverings. This was indeed *true Levite service*, but it was most blessed service, and its antitype in the Church now is what we should much seek after, because it is that which alone puts the Christian into his right place in the world, i.e., the place of a stranger. There could be but little attractiveness in the rams' skins and badgers' skins; but, little as there was, it was, nevertheless, the high privilege of the Gershonite to take them all up and bear them cheerfully on his shoulders across the trackless sands. What, then, are we to understand by the covering of the tabernacle? I believe, in a word, it shadowed out the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was that which would meet the eye. There might be, and were, other services among the Levites of a very blessed nature, but surely it was most elevated service to carry through the desert that which so strikingly prefigured the character of Christ.

This is what makes the saint "a stranger" (as the name Gershon imports) in the world. If we are walking *in the manifestation of the character of the Lord Jesus*, and in so doing realise our place as *in the wilderness*, we may rest assured it will impart a very decided tone of strangership to our character in the world. And oh, would that we knew much more of this. The Church has laid down the rams' skins and badgers' skins, and with them the Gershonite character: in other words, the Church has ceased to walk in the footsteps of her rejected Lord and Master, and the consequence has been that instead of being the wearied and worn stranger, as she should be, treading the parched and sterile desert, with the burden on the shoulders, she has settled herself down in the green places of the

world and made herself at home. But there was another feature of the stranger character shadowed out in the curtain, viz., *anticipation*. This was most blessed God dwelling in curtains showed plainly that neither God nor the ark of His strength had found a resting-place, but were *journeying on* towards "*a rest that remained*."

And how could there be *a rest* in the desert? There were no rivers and brooks *there* — no old corn *there* — no milk and honey *there*. True, the smitten rock sent forth its refreshing streams to meet their need, and Heaven sent down their *daily bread*; but all this was not Canaan. They were still in the desert, eating wilderness food and drinking wilderness water, and it was Gershon's holy privilege to carry upon his shoulders that which in the fullest manner expressed all this, viz., THE CURTAIN. "Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in? Whereas I have not *dwelt* in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have *walked in a tent* and in a *tabernacle*" (2 Sam. 7: 5-6). Here, too, we have sadly failed. The Church grew weary of the curtain, and wished to build a house before the time; she grew weary of "*walking in a tent*," and earnestly desired to " *dwell in a house*."

And truly we have all to watch and pray against this disposition to grow weary of our Gershonite character. There Is nothing so trying to nature as continual labour in a state of expectancy; our hearts love rest and fruition, and therefore nothing but the continual remembrance that "our sufficiency is of God" can at all sustain us in our Gershon or stranger condition.

Let us therefore remember that we bear on our shoulder the curtains, and have beneath our feet the sand of the desert, above our heads the pillar of cloud, and before us "the land of rest" clothed in never-withering green, and, both as a stimulus and a warning, let us remember that "He that endureth to the end THE SAME shall be saved."

{It would surely be of all importance in this day, when so many are declining from the narrow path of obedience to the written Word, and entering upon the wide and bewildering field of human tradition, to bear in mind that the Levite, when carrying the

tabernacle through the desert, found no support nor guide *from beneath*: no, the *grace* in which he stood was his *sole support*, and the *pillar above* his *sole guide*. It would have been miserable indeed had he been left to find a guide in the footmarks on the sand, which would change at every wind that blew *But all the sand did for him was to add to his labour and toil while he endeavoured to follow the heavenly guide above his head.*}

We shall next consider the Merarite feature of character; for, although the family of Merari does not stand next in order in the chapter, yet there is a kindredness of spirit, as it were arising out of the very nature of their service, that would link them together in the mind. But, not only is there this intimate connection between the services of these two classes of Levites, which would lead us to link them together thus, the Lord Himself presents them to us in marked unity of service, for we read, "And the Kohathites set forward bearing the sanctuary; and *the other* (i.e., the Gershonites and the Merarites) *did set up the tabernacle against they came*" (Num. 10: 21). Here, then, we see that it was the great business of these two families to pass onward through the desert in holy companionship, bearing with them, wherever they went, "*the tabernacle*," and, moreover, the tabernacle as looked at in its character of outward manifestation or testimony; which would, as a matter of course, put those who carried it thus into a place of *very laborious* discipleship. "And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto, and the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords" (Num. 3: 36-37). Here, then, was what Merari had to do: he had to take his place here or there, according to the movement of the cloud, and set up the boards of the tabernacle in their sockets of silver — and all this, be it remembered, upon the sand of the desert.

{It has been well observed that in the tabernacle God was seen bringing all His glory into immediate connection with the *sand of the desert*: and when the high priest went into the holy place, he found himself in the very presence of that glory, with his feet upon the *sand of the desert likewise*. In the temple, however, this was not

the case, for the floor of the house was *overlaid with gold* (1 Kings 6: 30).

So is it with the Christian now he has not as yet his feet upon the "pure gold" of the heavenly city, but his deepest and most abiding knowledge of God is that which he obtains in connection with his sorrow, toil and conflict in the wilderness.}

Could anything be more opposed to another than the nature of all that Merari had to set up was to the waste and howling wilderness around? What could be more unlike than silver and barren sand? But Merari might not shrink from all this; no, his language was, when he had arrived at a spot in the desert at which the cloud halted, "I am come to set up the patterns of things in heaven in the very midst of all the desolation and misery of the wilderness around." All this was most laborious, and would, no doubt, impart to the character of Merari a tone of sadness or sorrow which was at once expressed in his name, which means "*sorrow*."

And surely the antitype of all this in the Church now will fully confirm what has been stated about the character of Merari. Let any one take his stand firmly and decidedly in the world *for Christ* — let him penetrate into those places where "*the world*" is really seen in its vigour — let him oppose himself, *firm* as a rock, to the deep and rapid tide of worldliness, and *there* let him begin to set up "*the sockets of silver*," and, rest assured of it, he will find such a course attended with very much sorrow and bitterness of soul; in a word, he will realise it to be a path in which the cross is to be taken up "*daily*," and not only taken up, but borne. Now, if any further proof were needed of the above interpretation, we have a most striking one in the fact that there are but *very few* of the laborious Merarite character to be found; and why is this? Simply because the exhibition of such a character will ever be attended with very much labour and sorrow to nature, and nature loves ease, and therefore human nature never could be a Merarite; nothing will make us true Merarites but deep communion with Him who was "THE MAN OF SORROWS."

There is something in the service of Gershon from which one does not shrink so much as from that of Merari. For what had

Gershon to do? He had to place the curtains and badgers' skins over the boards which *had been already set up by his laborious and sorrowful brother*. And just so now: if a laborious servant of God has gone to a place where hitherto the world and Satan have reigned supreme, and there raised a testimony for Christ, it will be comparatively easy for another to go and walk on in the simple *manifestation* of Christian character, which would of itself put him into the place of "a stranger."

But, although nature may assume the character of a misanthropist, yet nothing but grace can make us Merarites, and the *true Merarite* is the *true philanthropist*, because he introduces that which alone *can bless*; and the very fact that a Merarite should have to take a place of sorrow is a most convincing proof that the world is an evil place. There was no need of a Merarite in Canaan, nor a Gershonite either: for the Merarite was *happy there*, and the Gershonite *at home*. But the world is not the Levite's home, and therefore if any will carry the curtains, he must be a stranger; and if any will carry the sockets and boards, he must be a man of sorrow; for when He who was a true Gershonite and a true Merarite came into the world He was emphatically *the Man of sorrows, who had not where to lay His head*.

However, if the Gershonite and the Merarite had to occupy a place in which they endured not a little of "the burden and heat of the day," yet the Lord graciously met them in that with a very rich reward, for "He is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love," and therefore, if they had to labour and toil *amongst* their brethren, they were blessedly ministered to *by* their brethren. Thus we read concerning the offerings of the princes: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen and gave them unto the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service. And four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. *But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none*, because *the service of the sanctuary*

belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders" (Num. 7: 4-9).

Here we see that the service of Gershon and Merari was that which met the rich and blessed ministrations of their brethren. Grace had filled the hearts and affections of the princes, and not only filled but overflowed them, and in its overflow it was designed to refresh the spirits of the homeless Gershonite and sorrowful Merarite: on the other hand, the Kohathites had no part in these ministrations; and why? Because *their service*, as we shall see presently, was in *itself* a rich reward indeed. We see the very same doctrine taught in the case of the Levites generally, as contrasted with the priests, in chap. 18, where we read: "And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither *shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel*" (ver. 20).

On the other hand, He says of the Levites, "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel *for an inheritance, for their service which they serve*, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."

And again, "Ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households, *for it is your reward* for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation" (ver. 21, 31).

Aaron occupied a position so truly elevated that any inheritance in the way of earthly things would have been to him most degrading; whereas the Levites (looked at in one aspect) had not this high standing, but had much hard labour; and consequently, while Aaron's very place and service was "*his reward*," the Levites had to get *a tenth* for "*their reward*."

We come now to consider the third and last division of the Levites, viz., the Kohathites, of whom we read, "The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward. And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the

hanging, and all the service thereof" (Num. 3: 29-31). We can now have no difficulty in understanding why it was that Kohath had no share in the ministrations of the princes. Gershon and Merari might need wagons and oxen to carry the boards, etc., but not Kohath; his charge was too precious to be committed to any or aught but himself, and therefore it was his high and honoured place to carry all upon his shoulders. What a privilege, for example, to be allowed to carry *the ark, the table, or the golden candlestick*! And would it not have argued an entire absence of ability to appreciate his elevated calling if he had sought for the assistance of oxen in his holy service? What, then, we ask, would have been the effect produced upon the character of Kohath by this his service? Would it not have imparted a very elevated tone thereto? Surely it would. What can be more elevated, at least as far as development of character in the world is concerned, than the display of that congregational spirit which is expressed in the name of Kohath? Should not Christians be found rebuking, by a *real* union *in everything*, man's oft-repeated attempt at forming associations for various purposes? And how can they effect that if it be not by gathering more closely around their common centre, Christ, in all the blessed fullness and variety of that Name? a fullness and variety typified by the varied furniture of the tabernacle, some of the most precious parts of which were designed to be borne on the shoulders of this favoured division of the tribe of Levi.

And surely we may safely assert that what would lead the saints now into more of the congregational spirit is just communion with Him whom the ark and table shadowed forth. If we were more conversant with Christ as the ark, covering in this scene of death, and, moreover, with the table of showbread, whereon stood *the food of the priests* — if, I say, we knew more of Christ in these blessed aspects of His character — we should not be as we are, a proverb and a byword by reason of our gross disunion. But, alas, as the Church grew weary of the curtains and the boards, and laid aside her Gershonite and Merarite character, so has she laid aside her Kohathite character, because she has ceased to carry the ark and the table upon her shoulder, and cast those precious pearls which were, through the grace of God, her peculiar property, to the swine, and thus has she lost her elevated character and position in the world.

Thus, let us review those three grand features of character shown forth in the tribe of Levi.

Strangership. "Therefore the world *knoweth us not*, because it knew Him not." "Here we have no abiding city." "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as *strangers* and *pilgrims* abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

Sorrow in the world. "*In the world ye shall have tribulation.*" "If they have *persecuted Me*, they will also *persecute you.*" "*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" "After that *ye have suffered awhile*, make you perfect" — "ye have need of patience" — "ye yourselves know that ye are appointed thereunto." "If we *suffer* with Him, we shall also reign with Him." "These are they that came out of *great tribulation*, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Union. "That they *all may be one.*" "He should gather together in *one* the children of God that are *scattered* abroad." "That He might reconcile *both* unto God in *one* body by the cross." And here, again, I would request of my reader to bear in mind that, while there was this beautiful diversity in the character and line of service of the Levites, yet they were *one people*, and *that manifestly* — they were *one* in *life*, *one* in standing, *one* in calling, *one* in inheritance; and so should it be with Christians *now*. We are not to expect uniformity of opinion on every point, nor yet are we to look for a perfect correspondence in the line of service and development of life; but then the saints should be seen as *one people* — *one* in worship,* *one* in labour, *one* in object, *one* in sympathy; in a word, *one* in everything that belongs to them in common as the people of God.

{*I say, *one in worship* and I would press this point, because at the present day it seems to be a thought in the minds of many that there may be unity in service and at the same time the greatest diversity in worship I would appeal to the spiritual mind of the Christian reader, and I would ask him, Can this really be? What should we say to a family who would unite, or appear to do so, for the purpose of carrying on their father's work, but who could not, by

reason Of division, meet around their fathers table? Could such unity satisfy a father who loved his children}

How sadly out of order it would have been for a Levite to call upon one of the uncircumcised of the nations around to assist him in carrying any part of the tabernacle! and yet we hear Christians now justifying and insisting upon the propriety of conduct not less disorderly, viz., calling upon the openly unconverted and profane to put their hands to the Lord's work. Thus we see that the Levites have become scattered, and have forsaken their posts. The Gershonite has refused to carry the curtains because he has become weary of the stranger condition; the Merarite has laid down the boards and sockets because he grew weary of bearing the cross, and the Kohathite has degraded his high and holy office by making it the common property of those who have not authority from God to put their hands thereunto. Thus the name of God is blasphemed among the heathen by us, and we do not "sigh and cry for the abominations" thus practised, but lift up our heads in proud indifference as if it all were right and as if the camp of God were moving onward in all heavenly order, under the guidance of the cloud, communicated by the silver trumpets. "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." May we walk more humbly before our God, and, while we mourn over the sad fact that "Overturn, overturn, overturn" has been written by the finger of God upon all human arrangements, let us remember that it is only "*until He come whose right it is,*" and then *all* shall be set right forever, for God, in all things, shall be fully glorified through Jesus Christ.

Thus dear reader, have we followed Levi in his course; and oh, what a marvellous course has it been! a course, every step of which displays the visible marks of sovereign grace abounding over man's sin — grace, which led God to stoop from His throne in the heavens to visit "the habitations of cruelty," in order to lift a poor perishing sinner from thence, and bring him, through the purging power of the blood, into a place of marvellous blessing indeed, even into the very tabernacle of God, there to be employed about the instruments of God's house. We have found Levi to have been indeed the one who "*was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found.*"

May we, then, adore the grace that could do such mighty acts! and if we have felt in our hearts the operations of the same grace in delivering us from the death and darkness of Egypt, may we remember that its effects should be to constrain us to live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again. We are now in the wilderness, where we are called to carry the tabernacle. May we cheerfully move onward, "*declaring plainly that we seek a country,*" and anxiously look out the "*the rest that remains.*"

Genesis 32:24-32

Jacob Alone With God.

In tracing the history of Jacob, and in contemplating his natural character, we are again and again reminded of the grace expressed in those words, "*Jacob have I loved.*" The question why God should love such a one, can only receive for an answer the boundless and sovereign grace of Him who sets His love upon objects possessing nothing of worth in themselves, and "who calls things that be not as though they were, that no flesh should glory in His presence." Jacob's natural character was most unamiable; his name indeed was at once the expression of what he was — "*a supplanter.*" He commenced his course in the development of this, his disposition, and until thoroughly crushed, as in these verses, he pursued a course of the merest bargain-making. On leaving his father's house, he makes a bargain with God. "If God," says he, "will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house, and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee" (Gen. 28: 20-22). Here we find him making a bargain with God Himself, the full evidence of what his real character was. Then again, mark him during the period of his sojourn with Laban; see there, what plans, what deep-laid schemes to promote his own ends. How plainly it is seen that *self* was the grand object before his mind, in all that he put his hand to. So it is in the course of this thirty-second chapter. He is deeply engaged in plans to turn away the dreaded wrath of his more manly, though badly treated, brother Esau.

But there is one circumstance with regard to Jacob in this chapter which deserves attention. He is seen labouring under the painful effects of a bad conscience, with regard to his brother; he knew that he had acted towards him in a way calculated to call out his anger and revenge, and he is therefore ill at ease at the prospect of meeting him. But God had a controversy with Jacob. He had to lead him through a course of education that was to teach him that "all flesh is grass." Jacob thought only of appeasing Esau by a

present. True, he turns aside, in this chapter, to offer up confession and prayer, yet notwithstanding, it is manifest that his heart was engaged about his *own* arrangements for appeasing Esau, more than anything else. But God was looking at him in all this, and preparing a salutary course of discipline for him, in order to teach him what was in his heart. For this purpose was "*Jacob left alone.*" All his company, arranged according to his own plan, had passed on, and he himself was awaiting this much dreaded interview with no small degree of anxiety. There is peculiar force in the words, "*Jacob was left alone.*" Thus is it with all who have been trained in the school of God; they have been brought into the stillness and solitude of the Divine presence, there to view themselves and their ways, where alone they can be rightly viewed. Had Jacob continued amid the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen, he could not by any means have enjoyed the same calm and sober view of himself and his past course, as he was led to in the secret of the presence of God. "*Jacob was left alone.*" Oh! there is no part of a man's history so important as when he is thus led into the solitude of the Divine presence; it is there he understands things which were before dark and inexplicable. There he can judge of men and things in their proper light; there, too, he can judge of self, and see its proper nothingness and vileness.

In Psalm 78 we find a soul looking abroad upon the world and reasoning upon what he saw there, — reasoning to such an extent, that he was almost tempted to say it was vain to serve the Lord at all.

In Psalm 77 we find a soul looking *inward*, and reasoning upon what he saw *within*, — reasoning to such an extent as to question the continuance of God's grace. What was the remedy in both cases? "*The sanctuary.*" I went into the sanctuary of God; and then understood. So it was with Jacob; his "sanctuary" was the lonely spot, where God wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

The careful reader will find that this passage, when taken as it stands, affords no foundation for the popular idea, namely, that it furnishes an instance of Jacob's power in prayer. That no such idea is set forth will at once appear from the expression, "*There wrestled*

a man with him;" it is not said that *he* wrestled with the man, which would give an entirely different aspect to the scene. I believe that, so far from its proving Jacob's power in prayer, it rather proves the tenacity with which he grasped the flesh, and the things thereof. So firmly indeed did he hold fast his "confidence in the flesh," that all night long the struggle continued. "The supplanter" held out, nor did he yield until the very seat of his strength was touched, and he was made to feel indeed that "all flesh is grass."

Such is the obvious teaching of this very important Scripture. Instead of Jacob's patience and perseverance in prayer, we have God's patience in dealing with one who needed to have his "*old man*" crushed to the very dust, ere God could make anything of him. This momentous scene gives us the grand turning point in the life of this extraordinary man. We are here reminded of Saul's conversion; Jacob, with the hollow of his thigh touched, like Saul, prostrate in the dust, between Jerusalem and Damascus. We observe, on the one hand, the broken fragments of "a supplanter," and the elements of God's mighty "Prince;" on the other hand, the fragments of a persecutor and injurious one, and the elements of God's mighty apostle.

And we may ask, What means the expression, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me"? What, but the utterance of one that had made the wondrous discovery that he was "without strength"? Jacob was let into the secret of *human weakness*, and therefore felt that it must be *Divine strength* or nothing. He thinks no more of his goodly plans and arrangements, his presents to appease my lord Esau. No; he stands withered and trembling before *the One* who had humbled him, and cries, "I will not let *Thee* go except Thou bless me." Surely, this is the gate of heaven! Jacob had, as it were, arrived at the end of *flesh*; it is no longer "*me*" but "*Thee*." He clings to Christ as the poor shipwrecked mariner clings to the rock. All self-confidence is gone, all expectations from self and the world blasted, every chain of self-devised security dissolved like a morning cloud before the beams of the sun. All his bargains availed him nothing at all. How miserable must everything that ever he did have seemed to him; yea, even his offer to give a tenth to God, when thus laid in the dust of self-abasement and conscious weakness! The mighty

wrestler says, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." What a striking expression, "Let me go." He was determined to make manifest the condition of Jacob's soul. If Jacob had without delay let go his grasp, he would have proved that his heart was still wrapped up in his worldly plans and schemes; but, on the contrary, when he cries out, "I will not let Thee go," he declares that God alone was the spring of all his soul's joy and strength: he, in effect, says, "Whom have I in heaven but *Thee*? and there is none upon earth I desire beside *Thee*;" or, with the twelve, in the sixth chapter of John: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Blessed experience! So is it with the poor convicted soul; he may have been trusting in his own righteousness, as Jacob was in his goodly, well-devised plans; he may have been building upon his moral life; but, oh! when once the arrow of conviction has pierced him, has laid open his very soul, and told him *all* that ever he did, he trusts in self *no longer*, but exclaims with Job, "Now mine eye hath seen *Thee*; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "I will not let *Thee* go except Thou bless me." Such will ever be the happy effect of a thorough acquaintance with our own hearts. Jacob now gets his name changed: he must not be any longer known as "the supplanter," but as "*a prince*," having *power* with God through the very knowledge of his *weakness*; for, "when I am *weak*, then am *I strong*." We are never so strong as when we feel ourselves weak, even as "water spilt upon the ground, that cannot be gathered up again;" and, on the contrary, we are never so weak as when we fancy ourselves strong. Peter never displayed more lamentable weakness than when he fancied he had uncommon strength: had he felt somewhat of Jacob's happy condition when his sinew shrank, he would have thought, acted, and spoken differently.

We should not turn from this passage, without at least seeing distinctly what it was that gave Jacob "power with God and with man;" it was the full consciousness of his own nothingness. Who that hearkens for a moment to those precious words, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," and beholds the humbled patriarch clinging closely to the One who had broken him down, can fail to see that Jacob's "power" consisted in his "*weakness*?" There is nothing here of Jacob's power in prayer. No: all we see is, first,

Jacob's strength in the flesh, and God weakening him; then, his weakness in the flesh, and God strengthening him. This is indeed the great moral of the scene. Jacob was satisfied to go "*halting*" on his journey, seeing he had learnt the secret of true strength. He was able to move along, using the words afterwards uttered by St. Paul: "I will, therefore, gladly glory in my *infirmities*, that the *power of Christ* may rest upon me." Yes, "*my infirmities*" on the one hand, and "*the power of Christ*" on the other, will be found to constitute the sum total of the life of a Christian.

I would observe, that there seems to be a marked connection between the spirit of this instructive passage and that of Galatians 6: 16: "As many as walk according to *this rule*, peace be on them and mercy, and upon *the Israel of God*." What rule? "The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is God's rule. It is not "circumcision or uncircumcision, but a new creature." (*kaine ktisis*) This the rule which distinguishes the Israel of God; this the grand distinction between "the supplanters" and "the princes:" the former trust in *the flesh*, the latter "*in the cross*." The Israel of God have ever been identified with weakness in themselves, like Jacob halting along, having the sentence of death written in their flesh. Thus the apostle goes on to say: "From henceforth let no one trouble me; for *I bear in my body* the marks of the Lord Jesus." (*stigmata tou kuriou*) So did Jacob bear in his "body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Nor was he at all ashamed of them; because, while they were at once the marks of *Jacob's weakness*, they were also the marks of *Israel's strength*. Blessed strength! May we know more and more of it daily.

I would only observe, in conclusion, that Esau was not met by *Jacob*, but by *Israel*, and as a consequence, all was peace and sunshine — the difficulty vanishes, the danger disappears. God, who had crushed Jacob's "*old man*," exercised an influence on Esau's mind, else the consequences might have been terrible. How happy it is for us when we can thus meet difficulties at the other side of the cross. Jacob had been *alone* with God, and could therefore be *alone* with Esau.

Genesis 35.

Restoration

The words "Arise, go up to Bethel" contain a great practical truth to which we desire to call the reader's attention.

It has been well remarked by some one that "God, in His dealings with us, always keeps us up to the original terms." This is true; but some may not exactly understand it. It may, perhaps, savour of the legal element. To speak of God as keeping us up to certain terms may seem to militate against that free grace in which we stand, and which has reigned through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. Many, we are aware, have a kind of horror of everything bordering, in the most remote way, upon the legal system; and we may say we sympathise with such.

At the same time, we must take care not to carry that feeling to such an extent as would lead us to throw overboard aught that is calculated to act in a divine way upon the heart and conscience of the believer. We really want practical truth. There is a vast amount of what is called abstract truth in circulation among us, and we prize it, and would prize it more. We delight in the unfolding of truth in all its departments. But then we must remember that truth is designed to act on hearts and consciences, and that there are hearts and consciences to be acted upon. We must not cry out, "Legal! legal!" whenever some great practical truth falls upon our ears, even though that truth may come before us clothed in a garb which at first sight seems strange.

We are called to "suffer the word of exhortation" — to listen to wholesome words — to apply our hearts diligently to everything tending to promote practical godliness and personal holiness. We know that the pure and precious doctrines of grace — those doctrines which find their living centre in the person of Christ, and their eternal foundation in His work — are the means which the Holy Ghost uses to promote holiness in the life of the Christian; but we know also that those doctrines may be held in theory, and

professed with the lips, while the heart has never felt their power, and the life never exhibited their moulding influence.

Yes, we frequently find that the loud and vehement outcry against everything that looks like legality proceeds from those who, though they profess the doctrines of grace, do not realize their sanctifying influence; whereas those who really understand the meaning of grace, who feel its power to mould and fashion, to purify and elevate, are ever ready to welcome the most pungent appeals to the heart and conscience.

But the pious reader may want to know what is meant by the expression quoted above, namely, "God always keeps us up to the original terms." Well, it simply means this, that when God calls us to any special position or path, and we fall short of it, or wander from it, He will recall us to it again and again. And further, when we set out under some special principle of action or standard of devotedness, and swerve from it, or fall below it, He will remind us of it, and bring us back to it. True, He bears with us patiently, and waits on us graciously; but "He always keeps us up to the original terms."

And can we not praise Him for this? Assuredly we can. Could we endure the thought of His allowing us to fall short of His holy standard, or to wander hither and thither without His uttering a word to urge us on or call us back? We trust not. Well, then, if He does speak, what must He say? He must just remind us of "the old terms." Thus it is, and thus has ever been. When Peter was converted at the lake of Gennesaret he forsook all and followed Jesus, and the last words that fell on his ear from the lips of his risen Lord were, "Follow thou Me." This was simply keeping him to the original terms. The heart of Jesus could not be satisfied with less, and neither should the heart of His servant.

By the lake of Gennesaret, Peter set out to follow Jesus. What then? Years rolled on; Peter had stumbled; he had denied his Lord; he had gone back to his boats and nets. What then? After the Lord's resurrection, as Peter, restored in soul, stood by the side of his loving Lord at the sea of Tiberias, he was called to listen to that one brief, pointed utterance, "Follow Me" — an utterance embracing in

its comprehensive grasp all the details of a life of active service and of patient suffering. In a word, Peter was brought back to the original terms — the terms between his soul and Christ. He was brought to learn that the heart of Jesus had undergone no change toward him — that the love of that heart was inextinguishable and unaltered; and, because it was so, it could not tolerate any change in Peter's heart — neither decline nor departure from the original terms.

Now we see the same thing precisely in the history of the patriarch Jacob. Let us just turn to it for a moment. At the close of Gen. 28 we have the record of the original terms between the Lord and Jacob. We shall quote it at length.

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed: and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Here, then, we have the blessed statement of what the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob undertook to do for Jacob and for his seed — a statement crowned by these memorable words, "*I will not leave thee. until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*" Such are the terms by which God binds Himself to Jacob; which terms, blessed be His name, have been and will be fulfilled to the letter, though earth and hell should interpose to prevent. Jacob's seed shall yet possess the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting

inheritance, for who shall prevent Jehovah Elohim, the Lord God Almighty, from accomplishing His promise?

Let us now harken to Jacob. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel.... And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace — then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

Thus much as to Bethel and the terms entered into there. God pledged Himself to Jacob; and though Heaven and earth should pass away, that pledge must be maintained in all its integrity. He revealed Himself to that poor lonely one who lay sleeping on his stony pillow; and not only revealed Himself to him, but linked Himself with him in a bond which no power of earth or hell can ever dissolve.

And what of Jacob? Why, he dedicated himself to God, and vowed that the spot where he had enjoyed such a revelation and darkened to such exceeding great and precious promises, should be God's house. All this was deliberately uttered before the Lord, and solemnly recorded by Him; and then Jacob went on his journey. Years passed — twenty long and eventful years — years of trial and exercise, during which Jacob experienced many ups and downs, changes, and varied trials; but the God of Bethel watched over His poor servant, and appeared unto him in the midst of his pressure, and said unto him, "I am the God of Bethel, *where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me*: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred."

God had not forgotten the original terms, neither would He let His servant forget them. Is this legality? Nay; it is the exhibition of

divine love and faithfulness. God loved Jacob, and He would not suffer him to stop short of the old standard. He jealously watched over the state of His servant's heart; and, lest it should by any means remain below the Bethel mark, He gently reminds him by those touching and significant words, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow." This was the sweet expression of God's unchanging love, and of the fact that He counted on Jacob's remembrance of Bethel scenes.

How amazing that the High and Mighty One, who inhabiteth eternity, should so value the love and remembrance of a poor worm of the earth! Yet so it is, and we ought to bear it more in mind. Alas, we forget it! We are ready enough to take mercies and blessings from the hand of God, and most surely He is ready enough to bestow them.

But then we ought to remember that He looks for the loving devotion of our hearts to Him; and if we, in the freshness and ardour of other days, set out to follow Christ, give up all for Him, can we suppose for a moment that He could coldly and indifferently forego His claim upon our heart's affections? Should we like Him to do so? Could we endure the thought of its being a matter of indifference to Him whether we loved Him or not? God forbid! Yea, it should be the joy of our hearts to think that our blessed Lord seeks the loving devotion of our souls to Him; that He will not be satisfied without it; that when we wander hither and thither, He calls us back to Himself, in His own gentle, gracious, touching way.

When, weary of His rich repast,

I've sought, alas, to rove;

He has recalled His faithless guest,

And showed His banner, Love.

Yes, His banner ever floats, bearing its own inscription upon it to win back our vagrant hearts, and remind us of the original terms. He says to us, in one way or another, as He said to Jacob, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou

vowedst a vow." Thus he deals with us, in the midst of all our wanderings, our haltings, and our stumblings. He makes us to know, that as we cannot do without His love, so neither can He do without ours. It is truly wonderful; yet so it is. He will keep the soul up to the old terms. Harken to those touching appeals of the Spirit of Christ to His saints in other days: "Thou hast *left thy first love*", - "Remember from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and *do thy first works*" (Rev. 2); "Call to remembrance *the former times*" (Heb. 10: 32); "Where is the blessedness ye spake of?" (Gal. 4: 15)

What is all this but calling His people back to the old point from which they had declined? It may be said, they ought not to have needed this. No doubt; yet they did need it; and because they needed it, Jesus did it. It may be said, further, that tried love is better than first love. Granted; but do we not find, as a matter of fact in our spiritual history, that upon our first setting out to follow Jesus there is a simplicity, an earnestness, a freshness, fervour and depth of devotion, which, from various reasons, we fail to keep up? We become cold and careless; the world gets in upon us and eats up our spirituality; nature gains the upper hand, in one way or another, and deadens our spiritual sensibility, damps our ardour, and dims our vision.

Is the reader conscious of anything like this? If so, would it not be a peculiar mercy if at this very moment he were called back to the old terms? Doubtless. Well, then, let him be assured that the heart of Jesus is waiting and ready. His love is unchanging; and not only so, but He would remind you that He cannot be satisfied without a true response from you. Wherefore, beloved friend, whatever has drawn you away from the measure of your earliest dedication to Him, let your heart now spring up and get back at once to Him. Do not hesitate. Linger not. Cast yourself at the feet of your loving Lord — tell Him all — and let your heart fully turn to Him, and let it be only for Him.

This is the secret spring of all true service. If Christ has not the love of your heart, He does not want the labour of your hands. He does not say, "Son, give Me thy money, thy time, thy talents, thine energies, thy pen, thy tongue, thy head." All these are unavailing, unsatisfying to Him. What He says to you is, "My son, give Me thy

heart." Where the heart is given to Jesus, all will come right. Out of the heart come all the issues of life; and if only Christ have His right place in the heart, the work and the ways, the walk and the character, will be all right.

But we must return to Jacob, and see further how our subject is illustrated in his fruitful history. At the close of Genesis 38 we find him settling down at Shechem, where he gets into all sorts of trouble and confusion. His house is dishonoured, and his sons in avenging the dishonour endanger his life. All this Jacob feels keenly, and he says to his sons Simeon and Levi, "Ye have troubled me . . . among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."

All this was most deplorable; but it does not appear to have once occurred to Jacob that he was in a wrong place. The defilement and confusion of Shechem failed to open his eyes to the fact that he was not up to the old terms. How often is this the case! We fall short of the divine standard in our practical ways; we fail in walking up to the height of the divine revelation; and although the varied fruits of our failure are produced on every side, yet our vision is so dimmed by the atmosphere around us, and our spiritual sensibilities so blunted by our associations that we do not discern how low we are, and how very far short of the proper mark.

However, in Jacob's case we see the divine principle again and again illustrated. "And God said unto Jacob, "Arise, go up *to Bethel*, and *dwell there*; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."

Note this. We have here a most exquisite feature in the divine method of dealing with souls. There is not one word said about Shechem, its pollutions and its confusions. There is not a word of reproof for having settled down there. Such is not God's way. He employs a far more excellent mode. Had we been dealing with Jacob we should have come down upon him with a heavy hand, and read him a severe lecture about his folly in settling at Shechem, and about his personal and domestic habits and condition. But oh, how well it

is that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways like ours!

Instead of saying to Jacob, "Why have you settled down in Shechem?" He simply says, "Arise, go up to Bethel"; and the very sound of the word sent a flood of light into Jacob's soul by which he was enabled to judge himself and his surroundings. "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us *arise, and go up to Bethel*; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."

This was, assuredly, getting back to the original terms. It was the restoring of a soul and a leading in the paths of righteousness. Jacob felt that he could not bring false gods and defiled garments to Bethel: such things might pass at Shechem, but they would never do for Bethel. "And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.... So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el; because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother."

"EL-beth-EL" Precious title, which had God for its Alpha and its Omega! At Shechem, Jacob called his altar "El-elohe-Israel," That is, "God, the God of Israel"; but at Bethel, the true standpoint, he called his altar "El-beth-el," that is God-the house of God. This was true restoration. Jacob was brought back, after all his wanderings, to the very point from which he had started. Nothing less than this could ever satisfy God in reference to His servant. He could wait patiently on him — bear with him — minister to him — care for him — look after him; but He never could rest satisfied with anything short of this — "Arise, go up to Bethel."

Christian reader, pause here, we want to ask you a question. Are you conscious of having wandered from Jesus? Has your heart declined, and grown cold? Have you lost the freshness and ardour which once marked the tone of your soul? Have you allowed the

world to get in upon you? Have you, in the moral condition of your soul, got down into Shechem? Has your heart gone after idols, and have your garments become defiled? If so, let us remind you of this, that *the Lord wants you back to Himself* Yes, this is what He wants; and He wants it now. He says to you at this moment, "Arise, go up to Bethel."

You will never be happy, you will never be right, until you yield a full response to this blessed and soul-stirring call. O yield it now, we beseech you. Rise up, and fling aside every weight and every hindrance; put away the idols and change your garments, and get back to the feet of your Lord, who loves you with a love which many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown; and who cannot be satisfied until He has you with Himself, according to the original terms. Say not this is legal; it is nothing of the sort. It is the love of Jesus — His deep, glowing, earnest love — love which is jealous of every rival affection — love which gives the whole heart, and must have a whole heart in return. May God the Holy Ghost bring back every wandering heart to the true standard! May He visit with fresh power every soul that has gone down to Shechem, and give no rest until a full response has been yielded to the call, "*Arise, go up to Bethel.*"

John 21: 1-19

A careful study of these verses will enable us to trace in them three distinct kinds of restoration, namely, restoration of conscience, restoration of heart, and restoration of position.

1. The first of these, restoration of conscience, is of all-importance. It would be utterly impossible to overestimate the value of a sound, clear, uncondemning conscience. A Christian cannot get on if there is a single soil on his conscience. He must walk before God with a pure conscience — a conscience without stain or sting. Precious treasure! May my reader ever possess it! but in each it must be a restoration to the original terms.

It is very obvious that Peter possessed it in the touching scene "at the sea of Tiberias." And yet he had fallen — shamefully, grievously fallen. He had denied his Lord with an oath; but he was

restored. One look from Jesus had broken up the deep fountains of his heart, and drawn forth floods of bitter tears. And yet it was not his tears, but the love that drew them forth, which formed the ground of his thorough restoration of conscience. It was the changeless and everlasting love of the heart of Jesus — the divine efficacy of the blood of Jesus — and the all-prevailing power of the advocacy of Jesus, that imparted to Peter's conscience the boldness and liberty so strikingly and beautifully exhibited on the memorable occasion before us.

The risen Saviour is seen in these closing chapters of John's Gospel watching over His poor, feeble, erring disciples — hovering about their path — presenting Himself in various ways before them — taking occasion from their very necessities to make Himself known in perfect grace to their hearts. Was there a tear to be dried, a difficulty to be solved, a fear to be hushed, a bereaved heart to be soothed, an unbelieving mind to be corrected? Jesus was present, in all the fullness and variety of His grace, to meet all these things.

So also when, under the guidance of the ever forward Peter, they had gone forth to spend a night in fruitless toil, Jesus had His eye upon them. He knew all about the darkness, and the toil, and the empty net; and there He was on the shore to prepare a dinner for them. Yes, the self-same Jesus who had died on the cross to put away their sins, now stood on the shore to restore them from their wanderings, gather them round Himself, and minister to all their need. "Have ye any meat?" developed the fruitlessness of their night's toil. "Come and dine" was the touching expression of the tender, thoughtful, all-providing love of the risen Saviour.

But let us note particularly the evidences of a thoroughly restored conscience as exhibited by Simon Peter. "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea." He could not wait for the ships or for his fellow-disciples, so eager was he to get to the feet of his risen Lord.

In place of saying to John or to the others, "You know how shamefully I have fallen; and although I have since then seen the

Lord, and heard Him speak peace to my soul, yet I think it more becoming in one that has so fallen to keep back; do you therefore go first and meet the blessed One, and I shall follow after." In place of aught in this style, he flings himself boldly into the sea — as much as to say, "I must be the very first to get to my risen Saviour; none has such a claim on Him as poor, stumbling, failing Peter."

Now, here was a perfectly restored conscience — a conscience basking in the sunlight of unchanging love; and is not this the true, original terms for every Christian? Peter's confidence in Christ was unclouded, and this, we may boldly affirm, was grateful to the heart of Jesus. Love likes to be trusted. Let us ever remember this. No one need imagine that he is honouring Jesus by standing afar off on the plea of unworthiness; and yet it is very hard for one who has fallen, or backslidden, to recover his confidence in the love of Christ. Such a one can see clearly that a sinner is welcome to Jesus, no matter how great or manifold his sins may have been; but then, he thinks, the case of a backsliding, or stumbling, Christian is entirely different.

Should these lines be scanned by one who has backslidden, or fallen, we would press upon him most earnestly the importance of immediate return to Jesus. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." What is the response to this pathetic appeal? "Behold, we come *unto Thee*; for Thou art the Lord our God." "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return *unto Me*" (Jer. 3: 22; Jer. 4: 1). The love of the heart of Jesus knows no change. We change; but He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever"; and He delights to be trusted. The confidence of Peter's heart was precious to the heart of Christ. No doubt it is sad to fall, to err, to backslide; but it is sadder still, when we have done so, to distrust the love of Jesus, or His gracious readiness to take us to His bosom again.

Beloved reader, have you fallen? Have you erred? Have you backslidden? Have you lost the sweet sense of divine favour, the happy consciousness of acceptance with God? If so, what are you to do? Simply this — "Return." This is God's own special word to the backslider. Return in full confession, in self-judgement, and in the fullest confidence in the boundless, changeless love of the heart of

Christ. Do not, we beseech you, keep away in the distance of your own unbelief. Do not measure the heart of Jesus by your own thoughts. Let Him tell you what is in His heart toward you.

You have sinned, you have failed, you have turned aside; and now, it may be, you are afraid or ashamed to turn your eyes toward the One whom you have grieved, or dishonoured. Satan too is suggesting the darkest thoughts; for he would fain keep you at a chilling distance from that precious Saviour who loves you with an everlasting love.

But you have only to fix your gaze upon the blood, the advocacy, the heart of Jesus, to get a triumphant answer to all the enemy's terrible suggestions, and to all the infidel reasonings of your own heart. Do not, therefore, go on another hour without seeking to get a thorough settlement of the question between your soul and Christ. Remember, "His is an unchanging love, free and faithful, strong as death." Remember, also, His own words, "Return, ye backsliding children" — "*Return to Me.*" Christ, and He alone, is the centre and circumference of all the terms to which our souls are bound. And, finally, remember that Jesus loves to be trusted.

2. But the heart has to be restored as well as the conscience. Let this not be forgotten. It often happens, in the history of souls, that though the conscience may be perfectly clear as to certain *acts* which we have done, yet the *roots* from whence those acts have sprung have not been reached. The acts appear on the surface of daily life, but the roots are hidden down deep in the heart, unknown, it may be, to ourselves and others, but thoroughly exposed to the eye of Him with whom we have to do.

Now, these roots must be reached, exposed, and judged, ere the heart is in a right condition in the sight of God. Look at Abraham. He started on his course with a certain root in his heart, a root of unbelieving reserve in reference to Sarah. This thing led him astray when he went down to Egypt; and although his conscience was restored, and he got back to his altar at Bethel, yet the root was not reached for years afterwards, as seen in the affair of Abimelech, king of Gerar.

All this is deeply practical, and most solemn. It finds its illustration in Peter as well as in Abraham. But now mark the exquisitely delicate way in which our blessed Lord proceeds to reach the roots in the heart of His dear and honoured servant. "So when they had dined." Not till then. There was no allusion to the past, nothing that might cause a chill to the heart, or bring a cloud over the spirit, while a restored conscience was feasting in company with a love that knows no change. This is a fine moral trait. It characterises the dealings of God with all His saints. The conscience is set at rest in the presence of infinite and everlasting love.

But there must be the deeper work of reaching the root of things in the heart. When Simon Peter, in the full confidence of a restored conscience, flung himself at the feet of His risen Lord, he was called to listen to that gracious invitation, "Come and dine." But "when they had dined," Jesus, as it were, takes Peter apart, in order to let in upon his soul the light of truth, so that by it he might discern the root from whence all his failure had sprung. That root was self-confidence, which had led him to place himself in advance of his fellow-disciples, and say, "Though all should deny Thee, yet will not I."

This root had to be exposed, and therefore, "When they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" This was a pointed and pungent question, and it went right to the very bottom of Peter's heart. Three times Peter had denied his Lord, and three times his Lord now challenges the heart of Peter — *for the roots must be reached if any permanent good is to be done*. It will not do merely to have the conscience purged from the effects which have been produced in practical life; there must also be the moral judgement of that which produced them. This is not sufficiently understood and attended to, and hence it is that again and again the roots spring up and bear forth their fruit with increasing power, thus cutting out for us the most bitter and sorrowful work, which might all be avoided if the roots of things were thoroughly judged and kept under judgement.

Christian reader, our object is entirely practical. Let us therefore exhort one another to judge our roots, whatever they may be. Do we know our roots? Doubtless it is hard, very hard, to know

them. They are deep and manifold: pride, personal vanity, covetousness, irritability, ambition — these are some of the roots of character, the motive springs of action, over which a rigid censorship must ever be exercised. We must let nature know that the eye of self-judgement is continually upon it. We have to carry on the struggle without cessation. We may have to lament over occasional failure; but we must maintain the struggle, for struggle bespeaks *life*. We must remember that the original terms are that in the flesh dwelleth no good thing. May God the Holy Ghost strengthen us for this vigilance against the flesh!

3. We shall close with a brief reference to restoration as bearing upon the soul's position, or path. The conscience being thoroughly purged, and the heart, with its varied roots, judged, there is moral preparedness for our proper path. The perfect love of Jesus had expelled all fear from Peter's conscience; and his threefold question had opened up the roots in Peter's heart, and now He says to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me." And this is exactly the original terms by which our Lord began with Peter as His disciple. It was then also, "Follow Me."

Here, then, we have in two words the path of the servant of Christ — "Follow *Me*." The Lord had just given Peter the sweetest pledges of His love and confidence. He had, notwithstanding all past failure, entrusted him with the care of all that was dear to His loving heart in this world, even the lambs and sheep of His flock. He had said to him, "If you have affection for Me, feed My lambs, shepherd My sheep"; and now, in one brief but comprehensive utterance, He opens before him his proper path — "Follow Me." This is enough. It includes all besides.

If we want to follow Jesus, we must keep the eye continually upon Him; we must mark His footprints and tread therein. Yes, mark them, and walk in them; and when tempted, like Peter, to "turn about," in order to see what this one or that one has to do, or how he

does it, we may hear the correcting words, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." This is to be our one grand and all-absorbing business, come what may. A thousand things may arise to distract and hinder. The devil will tempt us to look hither and thither, to look at this one and that one; to imagine we could do better here than there, or there than here; to be occupied with, and imitating, the work of some fellow-servant. All this is met by those pointed words, "Follow Me."

There is immense danger of following in the wake of others, of doing certain things because others do them, or doing things as others do them. All this has to be carefully guarded against. It will be sure to come to nothing. What we really want is a broken will — the true spirit of a servant that waits on the Master to know His mind. Service does not consist in doing this or that, or running hither and thither; it is simply doing the Master's will, whatever that may be. "They serve who stand and wait."

It is easier to be busy than to be quiet. When Peter was "*young*," he went whither he would; but when he got "*old*," he went whither he would not. What a contrast between the young, restless, ardent, energetic Peter, going whither he would, and the old, matured, subdued, experienced Peter, going whither he would not! What a mercy to have the will broken! — to be able to say from the heart. "*What Thou wilt — as Thou wilt — where Thou wilt — when Thou wilt*" — "not my will, but Thine, O Lord, be done"!

"*Follow Me!*" Precious words! May they be engraved on our hearts! Then shall we be steady in our course and effective in our service. We shall not be distracted or unhinged by the thoughts and opinions of men. It may happen that we shall get very few to understand us or to sympathise with us — few to approve or appreciate our work. It matters not. The Master knows all about it. If a master tells one of his servants distinctly to go and do a certain thing, or occupy a certain post, it is his business to go and do that thing, or occupy that post, no matter what his fellow-servants may think. They may tell him that he ought to be somewhere else, or to do something else. A proper servant will heed them not; he knows his master's mind, and has to do his master's work.

Would it were more thus with all the Lord's servants! Would that we all knew more distinctly, and carried out more decidedly, the Master's will respecting us! Peter had his path, and John had his. James had his work, and Paul had his. So it was of old: the Gershonite had his work, and the Merarite had his; and if the one had interfered with the other, the work would not have been done. The tabernacle was carried forward, or set up, by each man doing his own proper work.

Thus it is in this our day. God has varied workmen in His house and in His vineyard; and the original terms of service are that the Holy Spirit divideth to every one as *He* will. He has quarrymen, stone-squarers, masons, and builders. Are all quarrymen? Surely not. But each has his work to do, and the building is carried forward by each one doing his own appointed work. Should a quarryman despise a builder, or a builder look down with contempt upon a quarryman? Assuredly not. The Master wants them both; and whenever the one would interfere with the other (as, alas, we are apt to do), the faithful correcting word falls on the ear, "*What is that to thee, Follow thou ME.*"

Exodus 5: 1

Jehovah's Demand and Satan's Objections.

"Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness" Exodus 5: 1.

What a volume of truth is contained in this sentence! It is one of those comprehensive and suggestive passages which lie scattered up and down the divine volume, and which seize, with peculiar power, upon the heart, and open up a vast field of most precious truth. It sets forth, in plain and forcible language, the blessed purpose of the Lord God of Israel to have His people completely delivered from Egypt and separated unto Himself, in order that they might feast with Him in the wilderness. Nothing could satisfy His heart, in reference to them, but their entire emancipation from the land of death and darkness. He would free them not only from Egypt's brick-kilns and task-masters, but from its temples and its altars, and from all its habits and all its associations, from its principles, its maxims, and its fashions. In a word, they must be a thoroughly separated people, ere they could hold a feast to Him in the wilderness.

Thus it was with Israel, and thus it is with us. We, too, must be a fully and consciously delivered people ere we can properly serve, worship, or walk with God. We must not only know the forgiveness of our sins, and our entire freedom from guilt, wrath, judgement, and condemnation; but also our complete deliverance from this present evil world and all its belongings, ere we can intelligently serve the Lord. The world is to the Christian what Egypt was to Israel; only, of course, our separation from the world is not local or physical, but moral and spiritual. Israel left Egypt in person; we leave the world in spirit and principle. Israel left Egypt in fact; we leave the world in faith. It was a real, out-and-out, thorough separation for them, and it is the same for us. "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness."

1. To this rigid separation, as we very well know, Satan had and still has many objections. His first objection was set forth in the

following words, spoken by the lips of Pharaoh, "Go ye, and *sacrifice to your God in the land.*" These were subtle words — words well calculated to ensnare a heart that was not in communion with the mind of God. For it might with great plausibility and apparent force be argued, Is it not uncommonly liberal on the part of the king of Egypt to offer you toleration for your peculiar mode of worship? Is it not a great stretch of liberality to offer your religion a place on the public platform? Surely you can carry on your religion as well as other people. There is room for all. Why this demand for separation? Why not take common ground with your neighbours? There is no need surely for such extreme narrowness.

All this might seem very reasonable. But then, mark Jehovah's high and holy standard! Harken to the plain and positive declaration, "Let My people go!" There is no mistaking this. It is impossible, in the face of such a statement, to remain in Egypt. The most plausible reasonings that ever could be advanced vanish into thin air in the presence of the authoritative demand of the Lord God of Israel. If He says, "Let My people go," then go we must, spite of all the opposing power of earth and hell, men and devils. There is no use in reasoning, disputing, or discussing. We must obey. Egyptians may think for themselves; Jehovah must think for Israel; the sequel will prove who is right.

And here let us just offer a word, in passing, as to the subject of "narrowness," about which we hear so much now-a-days. The real question is, "Who is to fix the boundaries of the Christian's faith? Is it man or God — human opinion or divine revelation?" When this question is answered, the whole matter is easily settled. There are some minds terribly scared by the bugbear of "narrow-mindedness." But then we have to inquire what is narrowness, and what breadth of mind? Now, what we understand by a narrow mind is simply a mind which refuses to take in and be governed by the whole truth of God. A mind governed by human opinions, human reasonings, worldly maxims, Selfish interests, Self will. This we unhesitatingly pronounce to be a narrow mind.

On the other hand, a mind beautifully subject to the authority of Christ — a mind that bows with reverent submission to the voice of Holy Scripture — a mind that sternly refuses to go beyond the

written Word — that absolutely rejects what is not based upon "Thus saith the Lord" — this is what we call a broad, elevated mind.

Reader, is it not — must it not be so? Is not God's Word — His mind, infinitely more comprehensive, wide, and full than the mind and ways of man? Is there not infinitely greater breadth in the Holy Scriptures than in all the human writings under the sun? Does it not argue more largeness of heart, and devotion of soul to be governed by the thoughts of God than by our own thoughts or the thoughts of our fellows? It seems to us there can be but one reply to these questions; and hence the entire subject of narrowness resolves itself into this simple but very telling motto, "We must be as narrow as Christ, and as broad as Christ."

We must view everything from this blessed standpoint, and then our entire range of vision will be correct, and our conclusions thoroughly sound. But if Christ be not our standpoint, but self, or man, or the world, then our entire range of vision is false, and our conclusions thoroughly unsound.

All this is as clear as a sunbeam to a single eye and an honest and loyal heart. And, really, if the eye be not single, and the heart true to Christ, and the conscience subject to the Word, it is a complete loss of time to argue or discuss. Of what possible use can it be to argue with a man who, instead of obeying the Word of God, is only seeking to turn aside its edge? None whatever. It is a hopeless task to reason with one who has never taken in the mighty moral import of that most precious word — obey.

We must now return to our immediate theme. There is something uncommonly fine in Moses' reply to Satan's first objection, "It is not meet so to do: for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, as He shall command us" (Ex. 8: 26).

There would have been a lack of moral fitness in presenting to Jehovah, in sacrifice, the object of Egyptian worship. But, more than

this, Egypt was not the place in which to erect an altar to the true God. Abraham had no altar when he turned aside into Egypt. He abandoned his worship and his strangership when he went down thither; and if Abraham could not worship there, neither could his seed. An Egyptian might ask, Why? But it is one thing to ask a question, and another thing to understand the answer. How could the Egyptian mind enter into the reasons of a true Israelite's conduct? Impossible. What could such an one know of the meaning of a "three days' journey"? Absolutely nothing.

"Beloved, the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." The motives which actuate, and the objects which animate, the true believer lie far beyond the world's range of vision; and we may rest assured that in the exact proportion in which the world can enter into and appreciate a Christian's motives the Christian must be unfaithful to his Lord.

We speak, of course, of proper Christian motives. No doubt there is much in a Christian's life that the world can admire and value. Integrity, honesty, truthfulness, disinterested kindness, care for the poor, self-denial — all these things may be understood and appreciated; but, admitting all this, we return to the apostolic statement that "The world knoweth us not": and if we want to walk with God — if we would hold a feast unto Him — if it is our heart's true and earnest desire to run a consistent heavenly course, we must break with the world altogether, and break with *self* also, and take our stand outside the camp, with a world-rejected, Heaven-accepted Christ. May we do so, with fixed purpose of heart, to the glory of His own precious and peerless name!

2. Satan's second objection is very near akin to his first. If he cannot succeed in keeping Israel in Egypt, he will at least try to keep them as near to it as possible. "I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only *ye shall not go very far away*" (Ex. 8: 28).

There is more damage done to the cause of Christ by an apparent, partial, half-hearted giving up of the world, than by remaining in it altogether. Wavering, undecided, half-and half professors injure the testimony of the Lord more than out-and-out

worldlings. And, further, we may say, there is a very wide difference indeed between giving up certain worldly things, and giving up the world itself. A person may lay aside certain forms of worldliness, and, all the while, retain the world deep down in the heart. We may give up the theatre, the ball-room, the race-course, the billiard-table, etc., yet cling to the world all the same. We may lop off some of the branches, and yet cling with tenacity to the old trunk.

This must be carefully seen to. We feel persuaded that what multitudes of professing Christians need is to make a clean break with the world — that very comprehensive word. It is utterly impossible to make a proper start, much less to make any progress, while the heart is playing fast and loose with the holy claims of Christ. We do not hesitate to express it as our settled conviction that, in thousands of cases, where souls complain of doubts and fears, ups and downs, darkness and heaviness, lack of assurance and comfort, of light, liberty, joy, peace, and vivid realisation, it is owing to the simple fact that they have not really broken with the world. They either seek to hold a feast to the Lord in Egypt, or they remain so near as to be easily drawn back again; so near that they are neither one thing nor the other.

How can such people be happy? How can their peace flow as a river? How can they possibly walk in the light of a Father's countenance, or in the joy of a Saviour's presence? How can the blessed beams of that sun that shines in the new creation reach them through the murky atmosphere that envelops the land of death and darkness? Impossible! They must break with the world, and make a clear, decided, whole-hearted surrender of themselves to Christ. There must be a full Christ for the heart, and a full heart for Christ.

Here, we may rest assured, lies the grand secret of Christian progress. We must make a proper start before ever we can get on; and in order to make a proper start we must break our links with the world, or, rather, we must believe and practically carry out the fact that God has broken them for us in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross has separated us for ever from this present evil world. It has not merely delivered us from the eternal consequences of our sins, but from the present power of sin, and from the

principles, maxims, and fashions of a world that lieth in the hands of the wicked one.

It is one of Satan's masterpieces to lead professing Christians to rest satisfied with looking to the Cross for salvation while remaining in the world, or occupying a border position — "not going very far away." This is a terrible snare, against which we most solemnly warn the Christian reader. What is the remedy? True heart-devotedness to and fellowship with a rejected and glorified Christ. To walk with Christ, to delight in Him, to feed upon Him, we must be apart from the godless, Christless, wicked world — apart from it in the spirit of our minds and in the affections of our hearts — apart from it, not merely in its gross forms of moral pravity, or the wild extravagance of its folly and gaiety, but apart from its religion, its politics, and its philanthropy — apart from the world in all that goes to make up that comprehensive phrase.

But here we may be asked, "Is Christianity merely a stripping, an emptying, a giving up? Does it only consist of prohibition and negation?" We answer, with hearty and blissful emphasis, No! A thousand times, No! Christianity is pre-eminently positive — intensely real — divinely satisfying. What does it give us in lieu of what it takes from us? It gives us "unsearchable riches" in place of "dung and dross." It gives us "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven," instead of a poor passing bubble on the stream of time. It gives us Christ, the joy of the heart of God, the object of Heaven's worship, the theme of angels' song, the eternal sunlight of the new creation, in lieu of a few moments of sinful gratification and guilty pleasure. And, finally, it gives us an eternity of ineffable bliss and glory in the Father's house above, instead of an eternity in the awful flames of hell.

Reader, what sayest thou to these things? Is not this a good exchange? Can we not find here the most cogent reasons for giving up the world? It sometimes happens that men favour us with their reasons for resigning this, that, and the other branch of worldliness; but it strikes us that all such reasons might be summed up in one, and that one be thus enunciated: "The reason for resigning *the world* — *I have found Christ.*" This is the real way to put the matter. Men do not find it very hard to give up cinders for diamonds, ashes for

pearls, dross for gold. No; and in the same way, when one has tasted the preciousness of Christ, there is no difficulty in giving up the world.

If Christ fills the heart, the world is not only driven out, but kept out. We not only turn our back upon Egypt, but we go far enough away from it never to return. And for what? To do nothing? To have nothing? To be gloomy, morose, melancholy, sour, or cynical? No; but to "hold a *feast* to the Lord." True, it is "in the wilderness"; but then the wilderness is heaven begun, when we have Christ there with us. He is our Heaven, blessed be His name — the light of our eyes, the joy of our hearts, the food of our souls; for even Heaven would be no Heaven without Him, and the wilderness itself is turned into a heaven by His dear, bright, soul-satisfying presence.

Nor is this all. It is not merely that the heart is thoroughly satisfied with Christ; but the mind also is divinely tranquillised as to the difficulties of the path, and the questions that so constantly crop up to trouble and perplex those who do not know the deep blessedness of making Christ their object, and viewing all in direct reference to Him.

For instance, if I am called to act for Christ in any given case, and, instead of looking at the matter simply in its bearing upon Him and His glory, I look at how it will affect me, I shall most assuredly get into darkness and perplexity, and reach a wrong conclusion. But if I simply look at Him, and consider Him, and see how the matter bears upon Him, I shall see the thing as clear as a sunbeam, and move with holy elasticity and firm purpose along that blessed path which is ever illuminated by the bright beams of God's approving countenance. A single eye never looks at consequences, but looks straight to Christ, and then all is simple and plain; the body is full of light, and the path marked by plain decision.

This is what is so needed in this day of easy-going profession, worldly religiousness, self-seeking, and man-pleasing. We want to make Christ our only standpoint — to look at self, the world, and the so-called Church, from thence, regardless of consequences. Oh that it may be so with us, through the infinite mercy of our God! Then

we shall understand something of the force, depth, beauty, and fullness of the opening sentence of this paper, "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness."

Note the way in which Satan disputes every inch of the ground in the grand question of Israel's deliverance from the land of Egypt. He would allow them to worship *in* the land, or *near* the land; but their absolute and complete deliverance *from* the land is what he will, by every means in his power, obstinately resist.

But Jehovah, blessed be His eternal name, is above the great adversary, and He will have His people fully delivered, spite of all the powers of hell and earth combined. The divine standard can never be lowered — "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness." This is Jehovah's demand, and it must be made good, though the enemy were to offer ten thousand objections. The divine glory is intimately involved in the entire separation of Israel from Egypt, and from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." To this the enemy demurs; and to hinder it he puts forth all his malignant power, and all his crafty schemes. We have already considered two of his objections, and we shall now proceed to the third.

3. "And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the Lord your God: but who are they that shall go? And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord. And he said unto them, Let the Lord be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for evil is before you. Not so: go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord; for that ye did desire. And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence" (Ex. 10: 8-11).

These words contain a very solemn lesson for the hearts of all Christian parents. They reveal a deep and crafty purpose of the arch-enemy. If he cannot keep the parents in Egypt, he will at least seek to keep the children, and in this way mar the testimony to the truth of God, tarnish His glory in His people, and hinder their blessing in

Him. Parents in the wilderness, and their children in Egypt! — how opposed to the mind of God, and utterly subversive of His glory in the walk of His people.

We should ever remember — strange that we should ever forget! — that our children are part of ourselves. God's creative hand has made them such; and, surely, what the Creator has joined together, the Redeemer would not put asunder. Hence we invariably find that God links a man and his house together. "Thou and thy house" is a phrase of deep practical import. It involves the very highest consequences, and conveys the richest consolation to every Christian parent; and, we may truly add, the neglect of it has led to the most disastrous consequences in thousands of family circles.

Very many — alas, how many! — Christian parents, through an utterly false application of the doctrines of grace, have allowed their children to grow up around them in wilfulness and worldliness and while so doing they have comforted themselves with the thought that they could do nothing, and that in God's time their children would, if included in the eternal purpose, be gathered in. They have virtually lost sight of the grand practical truth that the One who has decreed the end has fixed the means of reaching it, and that it is the height of folly to think of gaining the end while neglecting the means.

Do we, then, mean to assert that all the children of Christian parents are, of necessity, included in the number of God's elect; that they will all be infallibly saved? — and if not, that it is the parents' fault? We mean to assert nothing of the kind. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." We know nothing of God's eternal decrees and purposes. No mortal eye has scanned the page of His secret counsels.

What, then, is involved in the weighty expression, "Thou and thy house"? There are two things involved in it. In the first place, there is a most precious privilege; and, in the second place, a deep responsibility. It is unquestionably the privilege of all Christian parents to count on God for their children; but it is also their bounden *duty* — do we dislike the homely word? — to train their children for God.

Here we have the sum and substance of the whole matter — the two sides of this great question. The Word of God, in every part of it, connects a man with his house. "This day is salvation come to *this house*." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house*" (Luke 19; Acts 16). Here lies the solid basis of the privilege and responsibility of parents. Acting on the weighty principle here laid down, we are at once to take God's ground for our children, and diligently bring them up for Him, counting on Him for the result. We are to begin at the very beginning, and go steadily on, from day to day, month to month, year to year, training our children for God.

Just as a wise and skilful gardener begins, while his fruit trees are young and tender, to train the branches along the wall where they may catch the genial rays of the sun, so should we, while our children are young and plastic, seek to mould them for God. It would be the height of folly, on the part of the gardener, to wait till the branches become old and gnarled, and then seek to train them. He would find it a hopeless task. And, most surely, it is the very greatest folly, on our part, to suffer our children to remain for years and years under the moulding hand of Satan, and the world, and sin, ere we rouse ourselves to the holy business of moulding them for God.

Let us not be misunderstood. Let no one suppose that we mean to teach that grace is hereditary, or that we can, by any act or system of training, make Christians of our children. No! nothing of the kind. Grace is sovereign, and the children of Christian parents must, like all others, be born of water and of the Spirit, ere they can see or enter the kingdom of God. All this is as plain and as clear as Scripture can make it; but, on the other hand, Scripture is equally clear and plain as to the duty of Christian parents to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

And what does this "bringing up" involve? What does it mean? In what does it consist? these, surely, are weighty questions for the heart and conscience of every Christian parent. It is to be feared, that very few of us indeed really understand what Christian training means, or how it is to be carried on. One thing is certain, namely, that Christian training means a great deal more than drilling

religion into our children, making the Bible a task-book, teaching our children to repeat texts and hymns like a parrot, and turning the family circle into a school. No doubt it is very well to store the memory of a child with Scripture and sweet hymns. No one would think of calling this in question. But is it not too frequently the case that religion is made a weariness to the child, and the Bible a repulsive school-book?

This will never do. What is really needed is to surround our children with a thoroughly Christian atmosphere, from their earliest moments; to let them breathe the pure air of the new creation; to let them see in their parents the genuine fruits of spiritual life — love, peace, purity, tenderness, holy disinterestedness, genuine kindness, unselfishness, loving thoughtfulness of others. These things have a mighty moral influence upon the plastic mind of the child, and the Spirit of God will assuredly use them in drawing the heart to Christ — the centre and the source of all these beautiful graces and heavenly influences.

But, on the other hand, who can attempt to define the pernicious effect produced upon our children by our inconsistencies, by our bad temper, our selfish ways, our worldliness, and covetousness? Can we be said to bring our children out of Egypt when Egypt's principles and habits are seen in our whole career? It may be we use and teach the phraseology of the wilderness or of Canaan; but our ways, our manners, our habits are those of Egypt, and our children are quicksighted enough to mark the gross inconsistency, and the effect upon them is deplorable beyond expression. We have but little idea of the way in which the unfaithfulness of Christian parents has contributed to swell the tide of infidelity which is rising around us with such appalling rapidity.

It may be said, and said with a measure of truth, that children are responsible spite of the inconsistency of their parents. But, most assuredly, whatever amount of truth there may be in this statement, it is not for parents to urge it. It ill becomes us to fall back upon the responsibility of our children in view of our failure in meeting our own. They are responsible, no doubt, but so are we; and if we fail to exhibit before the eyes of our children those living and

unanswerable proofs that we ourselves have left Egypt, and left it for ever, need we marvel if they remain?

Of what possible use is it to talk about wilderness life, and our being in Canaan, while our manners, our habits, our ways, our deportment, our spirit, the bent of our whole life, bears and exhibits the impress of Egypt? None whatever. The language of the life gives the lie to the language of the lips, and we know full well that the former is far more telling than the latter. Our children will judge from our conduct, not from our talk, where we really are; and is this to be wondered at? Is not conduct the real index of conviction? If we have really left Egypt, it will be seen in our ways; and if it be not seen in our ways, the talk of the lips is worse than worthless; it only tends to create disgust in the minds of our children, and to lead them to the conclusion that Christianity is a mere sham.

All this is deeply solemn, and should lead Christian parents into the most profound exercise of soul in the presence of God. We may depend upon it there is a great deal more involved in this question of training than many of us are aware of. Nothing but the direct power of the Spirit of God can fit parents for the great and holy work of training their children, in these days in which we live, and in the midst of the scene through which we are passing. That word falls upon the heart with heavenly sweetness and power: "My grace is sufficient for thee." We can, with fullest confidence, reckon upon God to bless the very feeblest effort to lead our dear children forth out of Egypt. But the effort must be made, and made, too, with real, fixed, earnest purpose of heart. It will not do to fold our arms and say, "Grace is not hereditary. We cannot convert our children. If they are of the number of God's elect they must be saved; if not, they cannot."

All this is one-sided and utterly false. It will not stand; it cannot bear the light of the judgement-seat of Christ. Parents cannot get rid of the holy responsibility of training their children for God; that responsibility begins with, and is based upon, the relationship; and the right discharge of it demands continual exercise of soul before God, in reference to our children. We have to remember that the foundation of character is laid in the nursery. It is in the early days of infancy that Christian training begins, and it must be steadily

pursued, from day to day, month to month, and year to year, in simple, hearty dependence upon God who will, most assuredly, in due time, hear and answer the earnest cry of a parent's heart, and crown with His rich blessing the faithful labours of a parent's hands.

And, while on this subject of training children, we would, in true brotherly love, offer a suggestion to all Christian parents as to the immense importance of inculcating a spirit of implicit obedience.

If we mistake not, there is very wide-spread failure in this respect, for which we have to judge ourselves before God. Whether through a false tenderness, or indolence, we suffer our children to walk according to their own will and pleasure, and the strides which they make along this road are alarmingly rapid. They pass from stage to stage with great speed, until, at length, they reach the terrible goal of despising their parents altogether, throwing their authority entirely overboard, and trampling beneath their feet the holy order of God, and turning the domestic circle into a scene of godless misrule and confusion.

How dreadful this is we need not say, or how utterly opposed to the mind of God, as revealed in His holy Word. But have we not ourselves to blame for it? God has put into the parents' hands the reins of government, and the rod of authority, but if parents, through indolence, suffer the reins to drop from their hands; and if through false tenderness or moral weakness, the rod of authority is not applied, need we marvel if the children grow up in utter lawlessness? How could it be otherwise? Children are, as a rule, very much what we make them. If they are made to be obedient, they will be so; and if they are allowed to have their own way, the result will be accordingly.

Are we then to be continually chucking the reins and brandishing the rod? By no means. This would be to break the spirit of the child, instead of subduing his will. Where parental authority is thoroughly established, the reins may lie gently on the neck, and the rod be allowed to stand in the corner. The child should be taught, from his earliest hour, that the parent only wills his good, but the parent's will must be supreme. Nothing is simpler. A look is enough

for a properly trained child. There is no need whatever to be continually hawking our authority; indeed nothing is more contemptible whether in a husband, a father, or a master. There is a quiet dignity about one who really possesses authority; whereas the spasmodic efforts of weakness only draw out contempt.

We have found, through many years of experience and careful observation, that the real secret of successful training lies in the proper adjustment of firmness and tenderness. If the parent, from the very beginning, establishes his authority, he may exercise as much tenderness as the most loving heart can desire or display. When the child is really made to feel that the reins and rod are under the direct control of sound judgement and true affection, and not of a sour temper and an arbitrary will, there will be little difficulty in training him.

In a word, firmness and tenderness are the two essential ingredients in all sound education; a firmness which the child will not dare to question; a tenderness which takes account of the child's every real want and right desire. It is sad indeed if the idea which a child forms of parental authority be that of arbitrary interference with, or a cold indifference to, his little wishes and wants. It is not thus our heavenly Father deals with us; and He is to be our model in this as in all beside.

If it be written, and it is written, "Children, obey your parents in all things"; it is also, in beautiful adjusting power, written, "Fathers, provoke not your children, lest they be discouraged." Again, if it be said, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right"; it is also said, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." In short, the child must be taught to obey; but the obedient child must be allowed to breathe an atmosphere of tenderness, and to walk up and down in the sunshine of parental affection. This is the spirit of Christian education.

Most gladly would we dwell further on this great practical subject; but we trust sufficient has been said to rouse the hearts and consciences of all Christian parents to a sense of their high and holy responsibilities in reference to their beloved offspring; and also to

show that there is a great deal more involved in bringing our children out of Egypt, and taking God's ground for them than many of us are aware of. And if the reading of the foregoing lines be used of God to lead any parent into prayerful exercise in this most weighty matter, we shall not have penned them in vain.

4. We shall close this paper with the briefest possible reference to the enemy's fourth and last objection, which is embodied in the following words, "And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you." He would let them go, but without resources to serve the Lord. If he could not keep them in Egypt, he would send them away crippled and shorn. Such is the enemy's last demurrer.

But mark the noble reply of a devoted heart. It is morally grand. "And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt-offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not a hoof be left behind: for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God; and" — ponder these suggestive words — *"We know not with what we must serve the Lord until we come thither."*

We must be fully and clearly on God's ground and at His stand-point, before ever we can form any true idea of the nature and extent of His claims. It is utterly impossible while surrounded by a worldly atmosphere, and governed by a worldly spirit, worldly principles, and worldly objects, to have any just sense of what is due to God. We must stand on the lofty ground of accomplished redemption — in the full-orbed light of the new creation — apart from this present evil world, ere we can properly serve Christ.

It is only when, in the power of an indwelling Spirit, we see where we are brought by the death and resurrection of Christ — "three days' journey" — that we can at all understand what true Christian service is; and then we shall clearly see and fully own, that "all we are, and all we have, belong to Him." "We know not with what we must serve the Lord until we come thither." Precious words! May we better understand their force, meaning, and practical application! Moses, the man of God, meets all Satan's objections by

a simple but decided adherence to Jehovah's demand, "Let My people go, that they hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness. "

This is the true principle we are called to maintain spite of all objections. If that standard be lowered, ever so little, the enemy gains his point, and Christian service and testimony are undermined — if not made impossible.

May the Eternal Spirit lead our souls into the wide field of practical truth indicated by the heading of this paper, "Jehovah's demand, and Satan's objections."

Many are the chains that bound me

But the Lord has loosed them all,

Arms of mercy now surround me

Favours these, nor few, nor small

Saviour, keep me!

Keep Thy servant lest he fall.

Exodus 12:13

The True Ground of Peace.

"When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Ex. 12: 13.

The blood on the lintel secured Israel's peace. There was nothing more required in order to enjoy settled peace, in reference to the destroying angel, than the application of the blood of sprinkling. God did not add anything to the blood, because nothing more was necessary to obtain salvation from the sword of judgment. He did not say, "When I see the blood *and* the unleavened bread or bitter herbs, I will pass over." By no means. These things had their proper place and their proper value, but they never could be regarded as the ground of peace in the presence of God.

It is most needful to be simple and clear as to what it is which constitutes the groundwork of peace. So many things are mixed up with the work of Christ, that souls are plunged in darkness and uncertainty as to their acceptance. They know that there is no other way of being saved but by the blood of Christ; but the devils know this, and it avails them naught. What is needed is to know that *we are saved* — absolutely, perfectly, eternally saved. There is no such thing as being partly saved and partly lost, partly justified and partly guilty, partly alive and partly dead, partly born of God and partly not. There are but the two states, and we must be in either the one or the other.

The Israelite was not partly sheltered by the blood, and partly exposed to the sword of the destroyer. He knew he was safe. He did not hope so; he was not praying to be so he was perfectly safe. And Why? Because God had said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." He simply rested upon God's testimony about the shed blood. He set to his seal that God was true. He believed that God meant what He said, and that gave him peace. He was able to take his place at the paschal feast in confidence, quietness, and assurance, knowing that the destroyer could not touch him, when a spotless victim had died in his stead.

If an Israelite had been asked as to his enjoyment of peace, what would he have said? Would he have said, "I know there is no other way of escape but by the blood of the lamb; and I know that that is a divinely perfect way; and moreover, I know that that blood has been shed and sprinkled on my doorpost; but, somehow, I do not feel quite comfortable. I am not quite sure if I am safe. I fear I do not value the blood as I ought, nor love the God of my fathers as I ought"? Would such have been his answer? Assuredly not. And yet hundreds of professing Christians speak thus, when asked if they have peace. They put their thoughts about the blood in the place of the blood itself, and thus in result make salvation as much dependent upon themselves as if they were to be saved by works.

Now the Israelite was saved by the blood *alone*, and not by his thoughts about it. His thoughts might be deep or they might be shallow, but deep or shallow, they had nothing to do with his safety. He was not saved by his thoughts or feelings, but by the blood. God did not say, "When you see the blood, I will pass over you." No; but "When I see." What gave an Israelite peace was the fact that Jehovah's eye rested on the blood. This tranquillised his heart. The blood was outside and the Israelite inside, so that he could not possibly see it; but God saw it, and that was quite enough.

The application of this to the question of a sinner's peace is very plain. Christ, having shed His blood as a perfect atonement for sin, has taken it into the presence of God and sprinkled it there; and God's testimony assures the believer that everything is settled on his behalf.

All the claims of justice have been fully answered; sin has been perfectly put away, so that the full tide of redeeming love may roll down from the heart of God, along the channel which the sacrifice of Christ has opened for it.

To this truth the Holy Ghost bears witness. He ever sets forth the fact of God's estimate of the blood of Christ. He points the sinner's eye to the accomplished work of the cross. He declares that all is done; that sin has been put far away, and righteousness brought nigh — so nigh, that it is "to all them that believe." Believe what?

Believe what God says, believe because He says it, not because you feel it.

Now, we are constantly prone to look at something in ourselves as necessary to form the ground of peace. We are apt to regard the work of the Spirit in us, rather than the work of Christ *for us*, as the foundation of our peace. This is a mistake. We know that the operations of the Spirit of God have their proper place in Christianity, but His work is never set forth as that on which our peace depends. The Holy Ghost did not make peace; but Christ did. The Holy Ghost is not said to be our peace; but Christ is. God did not send "preaching peace" by the Holy Ghost, but by "Jesus Christ." (Comp, Acts 10: 36; Eph. 2: 14, 17, Col. 1: 20)

The Holy Ghost reveals Christ; He makes us to know, enjoy, and feed upon Christ. He bears witness to Christ; takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He is the power of communion, the seal, the witness, the earnest, the unction. In short, His operations are essential. Without Him, we can neither see, hear, know, feel, experience, enjoy, nor exhibit aught of Christ. This is plain, and is understood and admitted by every true and rightly-instructed Christian.

Yet, notwithstanding all this the work of the Spirit is not the ground of peace, though He enables us to enjoy the peace. He is not our title, though He reveals our title and enables us to enjoy it. The Holy Ghost is still carrying on His work in the soul of the believer. He "maketh intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered." He labours to bring us into more entire conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. His aim is "to present every man perfect in Christ." He is the Author of every right desire, every holy aspiration, every pure and heavenly affection, every divine experience; but His work in and with us will not be complete until we have left this present scene, and taken our place with Christ in the glory. Just as, in the case of Abraham's servant, his work was not complete until he presented Rebekah to Isaac.

Not so the work of Christ for us. That is absolutely and eternally complete. He could say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17: 4.) And, again, "It is finished." The

blessed Spirit cannot yet say He has finished the work. He has been patiently and faithfully working for the last eighteen hundred years as the true, the divine Vicar of Christ on earth. He still works amid the various hostile influences which surround the sphere of His operations. He still works in the hearts of the people of God, in order to bring them up, practically and experimentally, to the divinely-appointed standard. But He never teaches a soul to lean on His work for peace in the presence of divine holiness. His office is to speak of Jesus. He does not speak of Himself "He," says Christ, "shall take of mine and shall show it unto you." He can only present Christ's work as the solid basis on which the soul must rest for ever. Yea, it is on the ground of Christ's perfect atonement that He takes up His abode and carries on His operations in the believer. "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." No power or energy of the Holy Ghost could cancel sin. The blood has done that. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

It is of the utmost importance to distinguish between the Spirit's work *in us*, and Christ's work *for us*. Where they are confounded, one rarely finds settled peace as to the question of sin. The type of the passover illustrates the distinction very simply. The Israelite's peace was not founded upon the unleavened bread or the bitter herbs, but upon the blood. Nor was it, by any means, a question of what *he* thought about the blood, but what God thought about it. This gives immense relief and comfort to the heart. God has found a ransom, and He reveals that ransom to us sinners, in order that we might rest therein, on the authority of His word, and by the grace of His Spirit. And albeit our thoughts and feelings must ever fall far short of the infinite preciousness of that ransom, yet inasmuch as God tells us that He is perfectly satisfied about our sins, we may be satisfied also. Our conscience may well find settled rest where God's holiness finds rest.

Beloved reader, if you have not as yet found peace in Jesus, we pray you to ponder this deeply. See the simplicity of the ground on which your peace is to rest. God is well pleased in the finished work of Christ — "well pleased for his righteousness' sake." That righteousness is not founded upon your feelings or experience, but

upon the shed blood of the Lamb of God; and hence your peace is not dependent upon your feelings or experience, but upon the same precious blood which is of changeless efficacy and changeless value in the judgment of God.

What, then, remains for the believer? To what is he called? To keep the feast of unleavened bread, by putting away everything contrary to the hallowed purity of his elevated position. It is his privilege to feed upon that precious Christ whose blood has cancelled all his guilt. Being assured that the sword of the destroyer cannot touch him, because it has fallen on Christ instead, it is for him to feast in holy repose within the blood-stricken door, under the perfect shelter which God's own love has provided in the blood of the cross.

May God the Holy Ghost lead every doubting, wavering heart to find rest in the divine testimony contained in those words, "WHEN I SEE THE BLOOD I WILL PASS OVER YOU."

Exodus 12.

The Passover in Egypt.

The Passover celebrated in Egypt is the well-known type of Christ averting from His people the judgement which overtakes the ungodly. The destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt, and smote the firstborn in every house. Israel escaped by the death of the lamb, and by that alone. The blood sprinkled on the door-post told the destroyer that the sentence of death had been already executed, and he therefore passed over. Hence, then, the blood distinguished the houses of the Israelites from those of the Egyptians. This was the grand distinction. When it was a question of life or death, the blood, and the blood *alone*, fixed the line of demarcation: "When *I see the blood*, I will pass over." This was Gods record, presented for the obedience of faith. The blood was outside, and Israel were inside, and hence they could not see the blood, nor was that needful. All that was needed was simple faith in God's record, and the more simple the faith the fuller was their peace. It was their privilege to eat the lamb within their houses with tranquillised hearts, while the destroyer passed through with unsheathed sword, inflicting terrible judgement on all who were not sheltered beneath the blood.

How simple is this! How striking! How much we learn from it! Throughout the vast mass of profession around us there are two classes those who have received God's salvation in the accomplished work of Christ, and those who, rejecting Him, build upon the multiplied forms of false or defective religion with which Christendom abounds. God's way of salvation is simple, as simple as it is complete: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom. 10: 9.) Christ is God's salvation, and, moreover, it is God's estimate of Christ that forms the basis of the believer's peace. It is very necessary to understand distinctly this latter point. There are many who suffer not a little by looking at their faith, instead of at the Object of faith; in fact, by unwittingly making a kind of saviour of their faith. Now faith is only the hand, as it were, that takes hold of the gift of God, just as the hand of a

hungry man takes the proffered bread and conveys it to his mouth. If I have my eye off Christ, and begin to examine the amount of my faith, I must of necessity decline, for He is the *only One* on whom the sinner's eye can rest. Genuine faith never looks at itself, but only at Jesus. A faithful Israelite would not have thought of going out to look at the lintel of his door, nor yet of examining the amount of his faith. No; he simply rested in the fact put before him in those precious words, "When I see the blood, I will pass over." It was not said, When I see your girded loins, your shod feet, your unleavened bread, I will pass over. These things were most needful, yea, essential, but not to save from the sword of the destroyer. To meet this nothing could avail but the blood of the lamb.

It is well that my reader should be clear as to the distinction between the ground of peace and that which is the spring of holiness and devotedness in his daily course; in other words, that he should understand the distinction between the work of Christ for us, and the work of the Spirit in us. The former is illustrated by the blood on the lintel without; the latter, by the Israelites' acting within. When any one through grace receives Christ in the divine efficacy of His accomplished work, he is introduced into a position in which God can address him as to his conduct; he becomes the subject of parental care and discipline. But then he must be careful not to confound the question of his walk with the ground of his perfect, his profound peace in the presence of God. Many, I feel persuaded, suffer in this way; they do not understand the fullness of Christ for them, and their everlasting completeness in Him, together with the settled judgement of God about them. Now while there is any dimness or uncertainty as to this, there can neither be settled peace of conscience nor any intelligent ground of Christian activity. Everything will be referred to the question of peace, rather than to the glory of Christ, which should be our aim, and which will be our aim in proportion as we enter into the divine reality of what we are in Christ through the infinite grace of God. The more we realise the truth that everything has been accomplished by Christ for the perfect establishment of our peace in connection with the holiness of God, the more we shall see how futile is every thought about ourselves. A question as to the believers peace is in reality a question as to the accomplishment of the work of Christ. If you touch one you touch

the other, for "Christ is our peace." He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." And not only is He the same always, but God's estimate of Him, and also of us in Him, is also the same: "Ye are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power." "As he is, so are we in this world." "Wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." (Num. 23. 21.) Not that iniquity and perverseness are not there, for "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." It would not give us any peace to be told that the Lord's people have not perverseness in them, but that *He hath not beheld it* tranquillises the heart most blessedly. It is God's grace that blots out sin, through the precious blood of Jesus. He delights to do this; yea, it is His glory "Thou hast cast *all* my sins behind thy back." This, beloved Christian reader, should banish every fear from your heart. God is not looking at your sin, but at the blood of the Lamb, and in that He sees the exquisite fruit of His own love, and triumphs in it. Now if God is not looking at your sin, why should you keep dwelling upon it? If He graciously triumphs in the fruit of His love, why should you not triumph in it also? The spring of your communion *is* your keeping your eye fixed upon the same object that God is looking at. Now if God is looking at Christ, and you are looking at your sins, of necessity there can be no communion. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" God says by virtue of the blood of Christ, "Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more." Are you calling them to remembrance? How many are anxiously occupied about the question of personal peace, which really stands at the very threshold of the Christian course! This sorrowful state of soul may arise from various causes. It may arise from imperfect or muddy views of the gospel, from not seeing the fullness of Christ, and the absolutely settled character of the forgiveness of sins

But there is another cause, and one of a far more grave and serious nature, namely, a careless and unconscientious walk; and cases of this melancholy kind often run to a great extreme — even to actual despair. Such cases teach the importance of seeking a close and faithful walk with God. "He will keep the feet of his saints ;" but they are exhorted to "keep their hearts with all diligence." The Spirit reveals Christ, and, if not grieved by sin and worldliness, will build

up the soul in His fullness, and establish it in the peace of God which passeth all understanding. But, alas! when conscience is tampered with — when we sin against light — when we walk in an indolent and self-indulgent spirit — when we let in the world upon our hearts, then the eye becomes dim, and the understanding darkened; feebleness and langour take the place of energy and vigour; and unless the soul be thoroughly broken down under the sense of its delusion, and restored by the grace of God, in all probability Satan will entangle it in the destructive meshes of carnality and worldliness; or, it may be, will well-nigh drive it into the dread region of infidelity. Should this paper fall into the hands of any one suffering in this way, let me entreat him at once to pause, and having ascertained, by honest self-judgement, the real cause of his low, heavy state, to bring it into the presence of his heavenly Father, and thus confess, judge and put away his evil. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

There is no reason why the believer should continue in a low or impoverished state of soul, unless he is deliberately trifling with conscience and grieving the Spirit of God. It is his privilege to have Christ, in all His divine fullness, between his soul and everything, no matter what — sins, infirmities, circumstances; and when the eye is steadily fixed upon and filled with Christ, nothing can interfere with his peace. But the secret cause of the low condition of so many of God's dear people is, that they have let slip Christ, and allowed other things to come in and occupy their hearts. *He* has been displaced; they have lost the freshness of the sense of what He is, and have therefore sunk down into a cold, formal condition. Moreover, the affections, feeling the lack of a definite object around which to entwine themselves, have gone out after the world. Nothing keeps the heart so free and peaceful as a single eye to Christ. There may be much to try and depress the heart; still there is peace. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me, peace." The Lord Jesus does not promise us exemption from tribulation; no, but He promises us peace *i n* the tribulation, and this is far more gracious. He came into the midst of His poor, terrified disciples, and said, "*Peace* be unto you." He did not take them *out of* their circumstances, but gave them peace in them. This is divine. The

believer should, like the Israelite, sit within, in the blessed fixedness of faith, feeding upon Christ, knowing that the blood of sprinkling is between him and all without. The worst that could come was death and judgement; but these had already been executed, and of this the blood on the lintel was the witness. It was impossible that anything could harm those who had taken shelter beneath the blood of the lamb.

It should be remarked, however, that peace of conscience and peace of heart are distinct things. Many have the former who do not enjoy the latter. Settled repose of heart in Christ is a precious fruit of simple communion with Him. It puts an end to all that restless anxiety which so eats up spiritual life. To the heart at rest — fully at rest in Jesus — circumstances are but of small moment. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, *his heart* is fixed, trusting in the Lord." It is dishonouring to the Lord to see His people giving way to cares and anxieties about present things; and, moreover, adopting the plans and arrangements current amongst the children of this world. Men say, or at least get abundant reason to say, that there is no difference between Christians and other people, inasmuch as all are seen pursuing the same objects, and pursuing them in the same way. When God's sufficiency fills the soul, plans and arrangements are little thought of. It is really wonderful to perceive how easily the soul loses the practical sense of God's presence and God's sufficiency. It is not that one ceases to be a Christian; this is not at all in question; but, alas! how many Christians are there who do not habitually walk with God! And yet the secret of true victory over nature and the world is, to walk with God. Nature is kept down, and the world is shut out; but when the soul is withdrawn from its blessed centre in God, everything becomes a difficulty.

We shall now look a little at the circumstances which accompanied the Passover. The blood on the lintel, as we have seen, formed the simple basis of the Israelite's security. It was an accomplished fact, with which he had nothing to do save to repose in its efficacy. But there were other points of deep interest and solemn moment into which the spiritual mind can enter with much profit.

First, then, *the lamb was eaten "roasted with fire"* No other process could have told out the significant principle with the same emphasis. The action of fire upon the body of the lamb gave expression, as forcibly as type could do, to the intensity of Christ's sufferings when He exposed His blessed person to the full action of Jehovah's righteous wrath against sin. Now it was one thing to rest in the security of the shed blood *without* and another thing to eat of the "lamb roast with fire." Hence the apostle says, "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and *fellowship of his sufferings*." Here was the desire of one who had already rested in the blood of sprinkling. The fellowship of Christ's sufferings is but little known even by those who are resting in the precious efficacy of Christ's blood; were it more entered into, there would be far more depth of experience and power of Christian action than there is. We are too ready to rest content with knowing the value of the blood, without feeding on the Lamb, and thus we lose much of what is really our privilege in the way of personal fellowship with Jesus. We are introduced by the blood into a position in which we can dwell with ever deepening joy upon the intrinsic excellency of the Person of Christ. It is not merely the work which has been done, hut the One who has done it. The former is properly the object for the sinner, the latter for the saint; and the more the saint is enabled to enter into what Christ is, the more perfect will be his repose in His work.

Again, *the lamb was eaten with unleavened bread*. This marked the power of holiness, as the practical result of that nearness to God into which the blood had introduced the soul. But, my reader observe, this holiness is the result of Christ's work applied to the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, and does not, in any wise, form the basis of our peace in the presence of God. This should be clearly understood, for the fact is, that this distinction will be found to constitute the great difference between true Christianity and all the false systems of religion of the present day. True Christianity puts Christ as the prominent object before the soul, and, moreover, shows that all real fruit to God must flow from the knowledge of our completeness in Him: false religion on the other hand, puts Christ in the background — puts Him in the distance, and teaches the sinner that he must work his way upward by virtue of his own fancied

holiness. Terrible delusion! Oh! for a simpler, clearer, fuller view of Jesus!

Lastly, *the lamb was eaten with bitter herbs*. This expresses the believer's experience, under the teaching of the Spirit, of the bitterness of that which dwells in him, which, though it has been most fully met in the cross, must ever be recognised as that which brought the Son of God down into the horrible pit and miry clay. It is only in the cross that the real heinousness of sin can be seen; and though it is there viewed in the light of that which puts it away for ever, yet the heart is self-judged and humbled even while it rests in an accomplished redemption.

Let me say, in conclusion, that the highest thought of all is, to have *Christ Himself* before the soul. It will not suffice to have thoughts of His work merely — thoughts of what He has done for us. There is much of mere selfishness in all this. We must be drawn to Jesus because of what He is; and this, so far from detracting from the value of His work, will deepen our sense of it every day.

Exodus 20:8-11

“Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made-heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day and hallowed it.” (Ex. 20:8-11)

The Sabbath, the Law, and the Christian Ministry.

"I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say."

A Scriptural Enquiry.

In resuming our lectures, for the winter months, we feel called upon to offer a few words of explanation to all such as may be desirous of knowing something of the doctrines held by those persons who stand connected, in any measure, with this service.

We feel that such persons have a claim upon us, to which we ought to respond, not for the purpose of vindicating ourselves, but simply to guard the truth against misrepresentation, and to remove, so far as in us lies, a stumbling-block out of the way of honest enquirers.

"Charity thinketh no evil;" and, hence, we shall not allow ourselves to think that any one could wilfully misrepresent our opinions; but it is a well-known fact that the most extravagant ideas are current in reference to these opinions; and while we can leave all those, who have given currency to such ideas, to Him before whose judgement-seat all must stand, (2 Cor. 5:10) we, at the same time, deem ourselves responsible "to give a reason of the hope that is in us," and of the ground which we occupy, "with meekness and fear," (1 Peter 3:15) in order to meet those who may be scared away from the consideration of truth, by the fact that monstrous errors are attributed to the persons who profess to hold and teach that truth.

We all know how prone we are to receive an opinion ready made to our hand, rather than take the trouble of investigating matters for ourselves, and comparing what is put before us, not with our own or others' preconceived Judgement or opinion, but with the word of God.

The Bereans were counted "more noble than those in Thessalonica," not because they consulted the decrees or traditions of the elders, but because "they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11) Now, this is precisely what we want the reader to do. We want him to imitate the "noble" conduct of the Bereans. We want him to "search the Scriptures," with an unbiased mind. We want him to form his convictions, not amid the darkness of misrepresentation and prejudice, but amid the pure and hallowed light which the page of inspiration sheds around him. We would affectionately entreat him to watch against a disposition to think people in error, merely because their position differs from his own. Let him seek for a dispassionate judgement, a calm, well-adjusted mind, a liberal spirit. In this way if he cannot agree with people, he will, at least, refrain from hard feelings, and hard words, neither of which can possibly serve any desirable end, either as regards himself or others. To ascertain truth is the object of every judicious and reflecting mind, and this object should ever be pursued with a spirit freed from the defiling and withering influences of a narrow and demoralising bigotry.

We shall now proceed with the special subject of these pages.

There are three important points in reference to which we are entirely misrepresented, namely, the Sabbath the Law, and the Christian Ministry.

And first, as to the Sabbath. If it were merely a question of the observance or non-observance of a day, it might be easily disposed of, inasmuch as the apostle teaches us in Rom. 14:5, 6, and also in Col. 2:16, that such things are not to be made a ground of judgement. But seeing there is a great principle involved in the Sabbath question, we deem it to be of the very last importance to place it upon a clear and scriptural basis. We shall quote the Fourth Commandment at full length. "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it

holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made-heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day and hallowed it.” (Ex. 20:8-11) This same law is repeated in Exodus 31:12-17. And, in pursuance thereof, we find, in Numbers 15 a man stoned for gathering sticks on the Sabbath-day. All this is plain and absolute enough. Man has no right to alter God's law in reference to the Sabbath, no more than he has to alter it in reference to murder, adultery, or theft. This, we presume, will not be called in question. The entire body of Old Testament Scripture fixes the seventh day as the Sabbath; and the Fourth Commandment lays down the mode in which that Sabbath was to be observed. Now, where, we ask, is this precedent followed? Where is this command obeyed? Is it not plain that the professing church neither keeps the right day, as the Sabbath; nor does she keep it after the Scripture mode? The commandments of God are made of none effect by human traditions, and the glorious truths which hang around “the Lord's day “are lost sight of. The Jew is robbed of his distinctive day, and all the privileges therewith connected, which are only suspended for the present, while judicial blindness hangs over that loved and interesting, though now judged and scattered, people. And, furthermore, the Church is robbed of her distinctive day and all the glories therewith connected, which, if really understood, would have the effect of lifting her above earthly things into the sphere which properly belongs to her, as linked by faith to her glorified Head in heaven. In result, we have neither pure Judaism nor pure Christianity, but an anomalous system arising out of an utterly unscriptural combination of the two.

However, we desire to refrain from all attempt at developing the deeply spiritual doctrine involved in this great question, and confine ourselves to the plain teaching of Scripture on the subject; and, in so doing, we maintain that if the professing church quotes the Fourth Commandment and parallel Scriptures, in defence of keeping the Sabbath, then it is evident, that, in almost every case, the law is entirely set aside. Observe, the word is, “thou shalt not do *any*

work." This ought to be perfectly binding on all who take the Jewish ground. There is no room here for introducing what we deem to be "works of necessity," we may think it necessary to kindle fires, to make servants harness our horses, and drive us hither and thither. But the law is stern and absolute, severe and unbending. It will not, it cannot, lower its standard to suit our convenience or accommodate itself to our thoughts. The mandate is, "thou shalt not do *any* work," and that, moreover, on "the seventh day," which answers to our Saturday. We ask for a single passage of Scripture in which the day is changed, or in which the strict observance of the day is, in the smallest degree, relaxed.

We request the reader of these lines to pause and search out this matter thoroughly, in the light of Scripture. Let him not be scared as by some terrible bugbear, but let him, in true Berean nobility of spirit, "search the Scriptures." By so doing, he will find that, from the second chapter of Genesis, down to the very last passage in which the Sabbath is named, it means the seventh day and none other; and, further, that there is not so much as a shadow of divine authority for altering the mode of observing that day. Law is law; and, if we are under the law, we are bound to keep it, or else be cursed, for "it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10)

But it will be said, "We are not under the Mosaic law; we are the subjects of the Christian economy." Granted — most fully, freely, and thankfully granted. All true Christians are, according to the teaching of Romans 7 and Romans 8 and Galatians 3 and Galatians 4 the happy and privileged subjects of the Christian dispensation? But, if so, what is the day which specially characterises that dispensation? Not "the seventh day," but "the first day of the week" — "THE LORD'S DAY." This is, pre-eminently, the Christian's day. Let him observe this day, with all the sanctity, the sacred reverence, the hallowed retirement, the elevated tone, of which his new nature is capable. We believe the Christian's retirement from all secular things cannot possibly be too profound on the Lord's day. The idea of any one, calling himself a Christian, making the Lord's day a season of what is popularly called recreation, unnecessary travelling,

personal convenience, or profit, in temporal things, is, to us, perfectly shocking. We are of opinion that such acting could not be too severely censured. We can safely assert, that we never yet came in contact with a godly, intelligent, right-minded Christian person who did not love and reverence the Lord's day; nor could we have any sympathy with one who could deliberately desecrate that holy and happy day.

We are aware, alas! that some persons have, through ignorance or misguided feelings, said things in reference to the Lord's day which we utterly repudiate, and that they have done things on the Lord's day of which we wholly disapprove. We believe that there is a body of New Testament teaching on the important subject of the Lord's day, quite sufficient to give that day its proper place in every well-regulated mind. The Lord Jesus rose from the dead on that day. (Matt. 28:1-6; Mark 16:1, 2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1) He met His disciples, once and again, on that day. (John 20:19, 26.) The early disciples met to break bread on that day. (Acts 20:7) The apostle, by the Holy Ghost, directs the Corinthians to lay by their contributions for the poor on that day. (1 Cor. 16:2.) And, finally, the exiled apostle was in the Spirit and received visions of the future on that day. (Rev. 1:10.) The above scriptures are conclusive. They prove that the Lord's day occupies a place quite unique, quite heavenly, quite divine. But they as fully prove the entire distinctness of the Jewish Sabbath and the Lord's day. The two days are spoken of throughout the New Testament with fully as much distinctness as we speak of Saturday and Sunday. The only difference is, that the latter are heathen titles, and the former divine. (Comp. Matt. 28:1; Acts 13:14, Acts 17:2, Acts 20:7; Col. 2:16)

Having said thus much as to the question of the Jewish Sabbath and the Lord's day, we shall suggest the following questions to the reader — namely, Where in the Word of God is the Sabbath said to be changed to the first day of the week? Where is there any repeal of the law as to the Sabbath? Where is the authority for altering the day or the mode of observing it? Where, in Scripture, have we such an expression as “the Christian Sabbath?” “Where is the Lord's day ever called the sabbath?” [For a fuller exposition of the doctrine of the

Sabbath, see "Notes on Genesis." (Chapter 2.) Also "Notes on Exodus." (Chaps 16. & 31.)]

We would not yield to any of our dear brethren in the various denominations around us, in the pious observance of the Lord's day. We love and honour it with all our hearts; and were it not that the gracious Providence of God has so ordered it in these realms, that we can enjoy the rest and retirement of the Lord's day without pecuniary loss, we should feel called upon to abstain from business, and give ourselves wholly up to the worship and service of God on that day, not as a matter of cold legality, but as a holy and happy privilege.

It would be the deepest sorrow to our hearts to think that a true Christian should be found taking common ground with the ungodly, the profane, the thoughtless, and the pleasure-hunting multitude, in desecrating the Lord's day. It would be sad, indeed, if the children of the kingdom and the children of this world were to meet in an excursion train on the Lord's day. We feel persuaded that any who, in any wise, profane or treat with lightness the Lord's day, act in direct opposition to the word and Spirit of God.

The above are our thoughts in reference to the Lord's day, and we therefore consider ourselves unfairly dealt with when we are represented as having any sympathy with the wickedness and infidelity that would propose measures for the open and deliberate profanation of the Lord's day. We utterly abhor such measures, and the spirit from which they emanate.

We shall now proceed to the consideration of the other points.

As regards the law, it is looked at in two ways: first, as a ground of justification; and, secondly, as a rule of life. A passage or two of Scripture will suffice to settle both the one and the other. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20.) "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Verse 28.) Again, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of

Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal. 2:16.)

Then, as to its being a rule of life, we read, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law, by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Rom. 7:4.) "But now are we delivered from the law, being dead to that (see margin) wherein we were held: that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." (Ver. 6.) Observe in this last-quoted passage, two things: 1st, "we are delivered from the law;" 2nd, not that we may do nature's pleasure, but "that we should serve in newness of spirit." Though delivered from bondage, it is our privilege to "serve" in liberty. Again, we read further on in the chapter, "And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be *unto death*." (Ver. 10.) It evidently did not prove as a rule of *life* to him. "*I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came sin revived, and I died.*" (Ver. 9.) Whoever "I" represents in this chapter, was alive until the law came, and then he died. Hence, therefore, the law could not have been a rule of life to him; yea, it was the very opposite, even a rule of death.

In a word, then, it is evident that a sinner cannot be justified by the works of the law; and it is equally evident that the law is not the rule of the believer's life. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." (Gal. 3:10.) The law knows no such thing as a distinction between a regenerated and an unregenerated man; it curses all who attempt to stand before it. It rules and curses a man so long as he lives; nor is there any one who will so fully acknowledge that he cannot keep it as the true believer, and hence no one would be more thoroughly under the curse.

What, therefore, is the ground of our justification? and what is our rule of life? The word of God answers, "We are justified by the faith of Christ," and Christ is our rule of life. He bore all our sins in His Own body on the tree; He was made a curse for us, He drained, on our behalf, the cup of God's righteous wrath; He deprived death of its sting, and the grave of its victory; He gave up His life for us; He went down into death, where we lay, in order that He might bring us up in eternal association with Himself in life, righteousness,

favour, and glory. before our God and His God, our Father and His Father. (See carefully the following scriptures: John 20:17; Rom. 4:25; Rom. 5: 1-10; Rom. 6:1-11; Rom. 7. passim, Rom. 8:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:30, 31; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Cor. 15:55-57; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 3:13, 25-29; Gal. 4:31; Eph. 1:19-23; Eph. 2:1-6; Col. 2 10-15; Heb. 2:14, 15; 1 Peter 1:23.) If the reader will prayerfully ponder all these passages of Scripture he will see clearly that we are not justified by the works of the law; and not only so, but he will see how we are justified. He will see the deep and solid foundations of the Christian's life, righteousness, and peace, planned in God's eternal counsels, laid in the finished atonement of Christ, developed by God the Holy Ghost in the word, and made good in the happy experience of all true believers.

Then, as to the believer's rule of life, the apostle does not say, to me to live is the law, but "To me to live is Christ." (Phil. 1:21.) Christ is our rule, our model, our touchstone, our all. The continual inquiry of the Christian should be, not is this or that according to law? but, is it like Christ? The law never could teach me to love, bless, and pray for my enemies; but this is exactly what the gospel teaches me to do, and what the divine nature leads me to do. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," and yet were I to seek justification by the law, I should be lost; and were I to make the law my standard of action, I should fall far short of my proper mark. We are predestinated to be conformed, not to the law, but to the image of God's Son. We are to be like Him. (See Matt. 5:21-48; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 13:4-8; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14-26; Eph. 1:3-5; Phil. 3:20, 21; Phil. 2:5; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1-7)

It may seem a paradox to some to be told that "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us," (Rom. 8:4) and yet that we cannot be justified by the law, nor make the law our rule of life. Nevertheless, thus it is if we are to form our convictions by the word of God. Nor is there any difficulty to the renewed mind in understanding this blessed doctrine. We are, by nature, "dead in trespasses and sins," and what can a dead man, do? How can a man get life by keeping that which requires life to keep it — a life which he has not? And how do we get life? Christ is our life. We live in Him who died for us; we are blessed in Him who became a curse for us by hanging on

a tree; we are righteous in Him who was made sin for us; we are brought nigh in Him who was cast out for us. (Rom. 5:6-15; Eph. 2:4-6; Gal. 3:13.) Having thus life and righteousness in Christ, we are called to walk as He walked, and not merely to walk as a Jew. We are called to purify ourselves even as He is pure; to walk in His footsteps; to show forth His virtues; to manifest His Spirit. (John 13:14, 15; John 17:14-19; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6, 29; 1 John 3:3.)

We shall close our remarks on this head by suggesting two questions to the reader, namely — Would the Ten Commandments without the New Testament be a sufficient rule of life for the believer? Would the New Testament be a sufficient rule without the Ten Commandments? Surely that which is insufficient cannot be our rule of life.

We receive the Ten Commandments as part of the canon of inspiration; and, moreover, we believe that the law remains in full force to rule and curse a man as long as he liveth. Let a sinner only try to get life by it, and see where it will put him; and let a believer only shape his way according to it, and see what it will make of him. We are fully convinced that if a man is walking according to the spirit of the gospel, he will not commit murder nor steal; but we are also convinced, that a man, confining himself to the standard of the law of Moses, would fall very far short of the spirit of the gospel.

The subject of "the law" would demand much more elaborate exposition, but the limits of this paper do not admit of it, and we therefore entreat of the reader to look out for the various passages of scripture referred to and ponder them carefully. In this way we feel assured he will arrive at a sound conclusion, and be independent of all human teaching and influence. He will see how that a man is justified freely by the grace of God, through faith in a crucified and risen Christ; that he is made a partaker of divine life, and introduced into a condition of divine and everlasting righteousness, and consequent exemption from all condemnation; that in this holy and elevated position, Christ is his object, his theme, his model, his rule, his hope, his joy, his strength, his all; that the hope which is set before him is to be with Jesus where He is, and to be like Him for ever. And he will also see that if, as a lost sinner, he has found pardon and peace at the foot of the cross, He is not, as an accepted

and adopted son, sent back to the foot of Mount Sinai, there to be terrified and repulsed by the terrible anathemas of a broken law. The Father could not think of ruling with an iron law the prodigal whom He had received to His bosom in purest, deepest, richest grace. Oh! no; "Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace; wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 5:1, 2) The believer is justified not by works, but by *faith*; he stands not in law, but in *grace*; and he — waits not for judgement, but for *glory*.

We now come, in the third place, to treat of the subject of the Christian ministry, in reference to which we have only to say, that we hold it to be a divine institution — its source, its power, its characteristics are all divine and heavenly. We believe that the great Head of the Church received, in resurrection, gifts for His body. He, and not the Church, or any section of the Church, is the reservoir of the gifts. they are vested in Him, and not in the Church. He imparts, them as, and to whom He will. No man, nor body of men, can impart gifts. This is Christ's prerogative, and His alone; and we believe that when He imparts a gift, the man who receives that gift is responsible to exercise the same, whether as an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher, quite independently of all human authority.

We do not, by any means, believe that all are endowed with the above gifts, though all have some ministry to fulfil. All are not evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Such precious gifts are only administered according to the sovereign will of the divine Head of the Church. Man has no right to interfere with them. Wherever they really exist, it is the place of the assembly to recognise them with devout thankfulness. Christians are exhorted to remember them that are over them in the Lord, to know them that guide them, and those who addict themselves to the ministry of the saints and those who have spoken to them the word of life. Were they to refuse to do so, they would only be forsaking and rejecting their own mercies, for all things are theirs. (See Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; 1 Cor. 12; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Cor. 16:15; Gal. 1:11-17; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

All this is simple enough. We can easily see where a man is divinely qualified for any department of ministry. It is not if a man say he has a gift, but if he in reality has it. A man may say he has a gift on the same principle as he may say he has faith, (James 2:14) and it may only be, after all, an empty conceit of his own ill-adjusted mind, which a spiritual assembly could not recognise for a moment. God deals in realities. A divinely-gifted evangelist is a reality; a teacher is a reality; a pastor is a reality; and such will be duly recognized, thankfully received, and counted worthy of all esteem and honour for their work's sake.

Now, we hold that unless a man has a *bona fide* gift imparted to him by the Head of the Church, all the instruction, all the education, and all the training that men could impart to him would not constitute him a Christian minister. If a man has a gift, he is responsible to exercise, to cultivate, and to wait upon his gift. Such an one may, or may not, be extensively read in human literature; he may, or he may not, be able to enlist his extensive reading in the Master's service. But, clearly, if a man has *only* the qualifications which human literature, human science, and human culture can impart, he is no more competent to be a Christian minister than a self-constituted quack is entitled to be regarded by the faculty of medicine as a duly-recognized practitioner.

Let us not be misunderstood. We hold that unless a man has a direct gift from Christ, though he had all the learning of a Newton, all the philosophy of a Bacon, all the eloquence of a Demosthenes, he is not a Christian minister. He may be a very gifted and efficient minister of religion, so called; but a minister of religion and a minister of Christ are two different things. And, further, we believe that where the Lord Christ has bestowed a gift, that gift makes the possessor thereof a Christian minister, whom all true Christians are bound to own and receive, quite apart from all human appointment. Whereas, though a man had all the human qualifications, human titles, and human authority, which it is possible to possess, and yet lacked that one grand reality, namely, Christ's gift, he is not a minister of Christ.

Such is our judgement in reference to the divine institution of the ministry; and hence, it is not fair or candid to accuse us of throwing

that institution overboard. God forbid! We bless His name for Christian ministry; and we feel assured that there are many truly gifted servants of Christ in the various denominations around us; but they are ministers of Christ, on the ground of possessing His gift, and not, by any means, on the ground of man's ordination. Man cannot add aught to a heaven-bestowed gift. As well might he attempt to add a shade to the rainbow, a tint to the violet, motion to the waves, height to the snow-capped mountains, or daub, with a painter's brush, the peacock's plumage, as attempt to render more efficient, by his puny authority, the gift which has come down from the risen and glorified Head of the Church. Ah! no; the vine, the olive, and the figtree, in Jotham's parable, (Judges 9) needed not the appointment of the other trees. God had implanted in each its specific virtue. It was only the worthless bramble which hailed with delight an appointment that raised it from the position of a *real nothing* to be an *official something*. Thus it is with a divinely-gifted man. He has what God has given him; he wants, he asks, no more. He rises above the narrow enclosures which man's authority would erect around him, and plants his foot upon that elevated ground where prophets and apostles have stood. He feels that it lies not within the range of the schools and colleges of this world, to open to him his proper sphere of action. It appertains not to them to provide a setting for the precious gem which sovereign grace has imparted. The hand which has bestowed the gem can alone provide the proper setting. The grace which has implanted the gift can alone throw open a proper sphere for its exercise. What! can it be possible that those gifts which emanate from the Church's triumphant and glorious Lord are not available for her edification, until they are dragged through the mire of a heathen mythology? Alas! for the heart that can think so. As well might we say that the fatness of the olive and the pure blood of the grape must be mingled with the contents of a quagmire, to render them available for human use.

But, it will be asked, "Were there not elders and deacons in the early Church, and ought we not to have such likewise?" Unquestionably, there were elders and deacons in the early Church. They were appointed by the apostles, or those whom the apostles deputed. That is to say, they were appointed by the Holy Ghost, the only One who could then, or can now, appoint them. We believe that

none but God can make or appoint an elder; and, therefore, for man to set about such work, is but a powerless form, an empty name. Men may, and do, point us to the shadows of their own creation, and call upon us to recognize in those shadows divine realities; but, alas! when we examine them in the light of Holy Scripture, we cannot even trace the outline, to say nothing of the living, speaking, features of the divine original.

We see divinely-appointed elders in the New Testament, and we see humanly-appointed elders in the professing church; but we can, by no means, accept the latter as a substitute for the former. We cannot accept a mere shadow in lieu of the substance. Neither do we believe that men have any divine authority for their act when they set about making and appointing elders. We believe that when Paul, or Timothy, or Titus ordained elders, they did so as acting by the power and under the direct authority of the Holy Ghost; but we deny that any man, or body of men, can so act now. We believe it was the Holy Ghost then, and it must be the Holy Ghost now. Human assumption is perfectly contemptible. If God raises up an elder or a pastor we thankfully own him. He both can and does raise up such. He does raise up men fitted, by His Spirit, to take the oversight of His flock, and to feed His lambs and sheep. His hand is not shortened that He cannot provide those blessings for His Church, even amid its humiliating ruins. The reservoir of spiritual gift in Christ, the Head, is not so exhausted that He cannot shed forth upon His body all that is needed for the edification thereof.

We are of opinion that, were it not for our impatient attempts to provide for ourselves, by making pastors and elders of our own, we should be far more richly endowed with pastors and teachers after God's own heart. We need not marvel that He leaves us to our own resources when, by our unbelief, we limit Him in His. Instead of "proving" Him we "limit" Him; and, therefore, we are shorn of our strength, and left in barrenness and desolation; or, what is worse, we betake ourselves to the miserable provisions of human expediency.

However, we believe it is far better, if we have not God's reality, to remain in the position of real, felt, confessed weakness, than to put forth the hollow assumption of strength; we believe it is better to be real in our poverty than to put on the appearance of wealth. It is

infinitely better to wait on God to whatever He may be pleased to bestow, than to limit His grace by our unbelief, or hinder His provision for us by making provision for ourselves.

We ask, where is the Church's warrant for calling, making, or appointing pastors? Where have we an instance in the New Testament of a Church electing its own pastor? Acts 1:23-26 has been adduced in proof But the very wording of the passage is sufficient to prove that it furnishes no warrant whatsoever. Even the eleven apostles could not elect a brother apostle, but had to commit it to higher authority. Their words are — "Thou, LORD, *which knowest the hearts of all*, show whether of these two *thou hast chosen*." This is very plain. They did not attempt to choose. God knew the heart. He had formed the vessel. He had put the treasure therein, and He alone could appoint it to its proper place.

It is very evident, therefore, that the case of the eleven apostles calling upon the Lord to choose a man to fill up their number, affords no precedent whatever for a congregation electing a pastor; it is entirely against any such practice. God alone can make or appoint an apostle or an elder, an evangelist or a pastor. This is our firm belief, and we ask for a Scripture proof of its unsoundness. Human opinion will not avail; tradition will not avail; expediency will not avail. Let us be taught from the word of God, that the early Church ever elected its own pastors or teachers. We positively affirm that there is not so much as a single line of scripture in proof of any such custom. If we could only find direction in the word of God to make and appoint pastors, we should at once seek to carry such direction into effect; but, in the absence of any divine warrant, we could only regard it as a mimicry, on our part, to attempt such a thing. Why was not the Church at Ephesus, or why were not the Churches at Crete, directed to elect or appoint elders? Why was the direction given to Timothy and Titus, without the slightest reference to the Church or to any part of the Church! Because, as we believe, Timothy and Titus acted by the direct power and under the direct authority of God the Holy Ghost, and, hence, their appointment was to be regarded by the Church as divine.

{*We would here offer a remark, in reference to the appointment of Deacons in Acts 6. This case has been adduced in proof of the

rightness of a congregation electing its own pastor; but the proof fails in every particular. In the first place, the business of those deacons was "to serve tables." Their functions, as deacons, were temporal, not spiritual. They might possess spiritual gift, independently altogether of their deaconship. Stephen did possess such.

But more than this. Although the disciples were called upon to look out for men competent to take charge of their temporal affairs, yet the apostles alone could appoint them. Their words are, "Whom we may appoint over this business." In other words, although there is a vast difference between a deacon and a pastor, between taking charge of money and taking the oversight of souls, yet even in the matter of a deacon, the appointment in Acts 6 was entirely divine; and hence it affords no warrant for a Church electing its own pastor.

We might further add, that *office* and *gift*? are clearly distinguished in the word of God. There might be, and were many elders and deacons in any given Church, and yet the fullest and freest exercise of gift when the whole Church came together into one place. Elders and deacons might or might not have the gift of teaching or exhortation. Such gift was quite independent of their special office. In 1 Cor. 14, where it is said, "Ye may all prophecy one by one" and where we have a full view of the public assembly, there is not a word about an elder or a president of any kind whatever.}

But where have we anything like this now? Where is the Timothy or the Titus now? Where is there the least intimation in the New Testament that there should be a succession of men invested with the power to ordain elders or pastors? True, the Apostle Paul, in his Second Epistle to Timothy, says, "The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2) But there is not a word here about a succession of men having power to ordain elders and pastors. Assuredly teaching is not ordination, still less is it imparting the power to ordain. If the inspired apostle had meant to convey to the mind of Timothy that he was to commit to others authority to ordain, and that such authority was to descend by a regular chain of succession, he could and would have done so,

and in that case, the passage would have run thus: "The power which has been vested in you, the same do thou vest in faithful men, that they may be able also to ordain others." Such, however, is not the case; and we deny that there is any man, or body of men, now upon earth, possessing power to ordain elders, nor was that power or authority ever committed to the Church. We hold it to be absolutely divine, and, therefore, when God sends an elder or a pastor, an evangelist or a teacher, we thankfully hail the heaven bestowed gift; but we desire to be delivered from all empty pretension. We will have God's reality or nothing. We will have heaven's genuine coin, not earth's counterfeit. Like the Tirshatha of old, who said "that they should not eat of the most holy things till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim," (Ezra 2:63) so would we say, let us rather, if it must be so, remain without office-bearers, than substitute, for God's realities, the shadows of our own creation. Ezra could not accept the pretensions of men. Men might *say* they were priests, but if they could not produce the divine warrant and the divine qualifications, they were utterly rejected. In order for a man to be entitled to approach the altar of the God of Israel, he should not only be descended from Aaron, but also be free from every bodily blemish. (See Lev. 21:16-23) So, now, in order for any man to minister in the Church of God, he must be a regenerated man, and he must have the necessary spiritual qualifications. Even St. Paul, in his powerful appeal to the conscience and judgement of the Church at Corinth, refers to his spiritual gifts and the fruits of his labour, as the indisputable evidences of his apostleship. (See 2 Cor. 10, 2 Cor. 12)

Before dismissing the subject of the Christian Ministry, we would offer a remark upon the practice of laying on of hands, which is presented in the New Testament in two ways. First, we find it connected with the communication of a positive gift. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." (1 Tim. 4:14.) This is again referred to in the second epistle: "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." (2 Tim. 1:6.) This latter passage fixes the import of the expression "presbytery," as used in the first epistle. Both passages prove that the act of laying on of hands, in Timothy's case, was connected with the imparting of a gift. But, secondly, we

find the laying on of hands adopted simply for the purpose of expressing full fellowship and identification, as in Acts 13:3. It could not possibly mean ordination in this passage, inasmuch as Paul and Barnabas had been in the ministry long before. It simply gave beautiful expression to the full identification of their brethren in that work unto which the Holy Ghost had called them, and to which He alone could send them forth.

Now, we believe that the laying on of hands as expressing ordination, if there be not the power to impart a gift, is worth nothing, if indeed it be not mere assumption; but if it be merely adopted as the expression of full fellowship in any special work or mission, we should quite rejoice in it. For example, if two or three brethren felt themselves called of God to go on an evangelistic mission to the United States of America, and that those with whom they were in communion perceived in them the needed gift and grace for such a work, we should deem it exceedingly happy were they to set forth their unqualified approval and their brotherly fellowship by the act of laying on of hands. Beyond this we can see no value whatever in that act.

Having thus, so far as our limits would permit, treated of the questions of the Sabbath, the Law, and the Christian ministry — having shown that we honour and observe the Lord's day, that we give the Law its divinely-appointed place, and, finally, that we hold the sacred and precious institution of the Christian Ministry, we might close this paper, did we not feel called upon to meet another charge which is frequently preferred against us — viz., the maintenance of a Jesuitical reserve in reference to our peculiar opinions until such time as we have persons under our influence. This charge is totally unfounded. In our general teaching and preaching, we seek to set forth the fundamental truths of the gospel, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal Sonship, the personality of the Holy Ghost, the plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture, the eternal counsels of God in reference to His elect, and yet the fullest and freest presentation of His love to a lost world; the solemn responsibility of every one who heard the glad tidings of salvation to accept the same; man's total ruin by nature and by practice; his inability to help himself in thought, word, or deed; the

utter corruption of his will; Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection; His absolute deity and perfect humanity in one person; the perfect efficacy of His blood to cleanse from all sin; perfect justification and sanctification by faith in Christ, through the operation of God the Holy Ghost; the eternal security of all true believers; the entire separation of the Church in calling, standing, and hope, from this present world.

Then, again, we hold, in common with many of our brethren in the Church of England and in the Free Church of Scotland, that the hope of the believer is set forth in these words of Christ: "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." (John 14:3) We believe that the early Christians were converted to "that blessed hope;" that it was the common hope of Christians in apostolic times. To adduce proofs would swell this paper into a volume.

Furthermore, we believe that all disciples should meet on the first day of the week to break bread, (Acts 20:7) and when so met, they should look to the Head of the Church to furnish the needed gifts, and to the Holy Ghost to guide in the due administration of these gifts.

As to the scriptural ordinance of baptism, we look upon it as a beautiful exhibition of the truth that the believer is associated with Christ in death and resurrection. (See Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41; Acts 8:38; Acts 10:47, 48; Acts 16:33; Rom. 6:3, 4.)

As regards the precious institution of the Lord's Supper, we believe that Christians should celebrate it on every Lord's day, and that, in so doing, they commemorate the Lord's death until He come. We believe that, as baptism sets forth our death with Christ, so the Lord's Supper sets forth Christ's death for us. We do not see any authority in the word of God for regarding the Lord's Supper as "a sacrifice," "a sacrament," or "a covenant." The word is, "This do in remembrance of me." (See Matt. 26:26, 28; Mark 14:22- 24; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26.)

The above is a very brief but explicit statement of our opinions and our practice, and we affectionately ask the candid and judicious

reader where is there aught of the Jesuit therein? We meet in public, our worship meetings, our prayer meetings, our reading meetings, our lectures, our gospel preachings, are all open to the public.

No intelligent person could suppose that we ought, in preaching the gospel to the unconverted, to introduce the deeper mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, or the Church of God. The Lord Jesus spake the word to the people "as they were able to hear it." (Mark 4:33) The Holy Ghost, by the apostle, did the same. (1 Cor. 3:1, 2; Heb. 5:11-14.) Should not every judicious teacher adapt his instructions to the condition of the taught? Who would teach conic sections or Euclid's elements to a child who had only learnt his alphabet? It must, at all times, be a question of spiritual wisdom as to what character of truth one ought to bring before those with whom he comes in contact; and it may sometimes be a question of grace to withhold a topic which would only produce controversy and hinder Christian fellowship; but surely wisdom and grace ought not to be dubbed with the opprobrious epithet of Jesuitical reserve.

But we have done. We would, in this closing line, entreat the reader to "search the Scriptures." Let him try everything by that standard. Let him see to it that he has plain Scripture for everything with which he stands connected. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20)

We can honestly say we love, with all our hearts, all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and wherever there is one who preaches a full, free and an everlasting salvation to perishing sinners, through the blood of the Lamb, we wish him God speed, in the name of the Lord.

We now commend the reader to the blessing of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. If he be a true believer, we pray that, in his course down here, he may be a bright and faithful witness for his absent Lord. But if he be one who has not yet found peace in Jesus, we would say to him, with solemn emphasis and earnest affection, "BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, WHICH TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD." (John 1:29)

Exodus 20: 24-26

THE TWO ALTARS

“An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: in all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.”

If anything could enhance the value or add to the interest of this passage of Scripture, it is the context in which it stands. To find such words at the close of Exodus 20 is something which must strike the thoughtful reader. In the opening of this chapter we find God speaking from the top of Mount Sinai and laying down the law as to man's duty toward God and his duty toward his neighbor. This law is published amid thunderings, blackness, darkness and tempest. “Thou shalt do this” and “Thou shalt not do that.” Such are the terms in which God speaks from the top of the fiery mount. Thus is He compelled to erect around Himself and around His rights, certain barriers to keep man off. And in the same way, has man to be kept from infringing the rights of his fellow.

Thus much as to the opening of Exodus 20. There are no such words here as, “I will come unto thee.” Quite the reverse. The word was, “Beware lest thou come unto Me.” See Exodus 19: 12, 24. It was impossible for man to get to God by way of law. The barriers that were placed around that mount were insurmountable to man. “By works of law shall no man living be justified.” Under the law there is no possible way of access to God. “Keep off” is the stern utterance of the entire legal system — the expression of the very spirit and character of the whole Mosaic economy. Nearness and liberty are unknown under the law, and cannot possibly be enjoyed by anyone on legal ground.

Hence we may safely say with reverence that Jehovah was not at home on the top of Mount Sinai. It was not natural to Him to surround Himself with barriers. He was forced into that position by the legality of the human heart. Israel had taken upon them to say, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19: 8). It was this

that caused Jehovah to place Himself at a distance so that man might be tested and the offense might abound. He had just said to the people, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine.”

To what “covenant” does He here refer? To the covenant made with Abraham — the covenant of grace. There was nothing of man's doing in this covenant. It set forth what God would do for Abraham and his seed, what He would give them and what He would be to them. It was on the ground of this covenant that Jehovah could say to Israel, “I have brought you unto Myself.” But the very moment Israel undertook to say, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do,” we hear the command issued to “set bounds about the mount” that the people might be put at a distance.

However, this was not according to the loving heart of the God of Israel. It did not suit His nature and character to place Himself at a distance from His people. They had compelled Him to retire within the narrow enclosures of mount Sinai and to surround Himself with clouds and darkness, thunderings, lightnings and tempest. Man had undertaken to *do*, and he must be put to the test. “The law entered that the offense might abound.” Again, “By the law is the knowledge of sin.”

It is not our intention in this short article to dwell upon the subject of “the law.” We have merely referred to it to bring out the striking contrast between the opening and the close of Exodus 20. It would seem as though God were in haste to come down from the top of that dreadful mountain in order to meet man at “an altar of earth” — the place of grace — the place where man's doings are displaced by God's. “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: in all places where I record My name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.”

What a contrast! It is as though He had said to them, “You cannot come to Me if I remain on the top of this mountain, but I will

come unto you. If I remain here I must curse you, but I will meet you at an altar of earth and bless you.” Blessed be His Name, He delights not in cursing. Hence He would not record His Name on Mount Sinai, the place of distance and darkness where He could not come unto His people and bless them.

How blessedly all this tells out what God is! This teaching about the altar is like a ray of divine light piercing through the gloom which surrounded Mount Sinai, and shining on the spot where God would record His Name, where He could meet His people in all the fullness of blessing.

And let the reader note the character of the offerings referred to in verse 24. We have “burnt offerings and peace offerings.” Not a word about sin offerings and trespass offerings. Why is this? Surely this is the very place in which we should expect to find these latter introduced. But no. We have the burnt offering — the type of Christ surrendering Himself in life and in death to do the will of God. And we have the peace offering — the type of Christ as the Object on which the worshipper feeds in communion with God. And not a word about the sin offering or trespass offering. Why? Is it that these are not needed? Far be the thought! They lie at the very foundation of that altar where God and the worshipper meet. The sin offering is the type of Christ bearing the judgment of God against sin. The trespass offering is the type of Christ bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. *These form the foundation of all worship.* But they are omitted in Exodus 20: 24 because we have here the nature and character of the worship in which God delights, a worship in which the soul is occupied with Christ in the very highest aspect of His Person and work. This is what we have in the burnt offering, wherein Christ is seen making atonement, not merely according to our need, but according to the claims of God — not merely according to the measure of the hatefulness of sin, but according to the measure of the preciousness of Christ to the heart of God.

What a striking contrast between the opening and closing lines of Exodus 20! What lessons are here for our hearts! What a rebuke to all our legal tendencies! We are all prone to be occupied with our doings in some shape or form. Legality is natural to our hearts. And let us remember, it was this that forced Jehovah (to speak after the

manner of men) to take up the position in which we find Him in Exodus 19 and 20. Abraham did not know God in such a position. It was not as a lawgiver that God revealed Himself to the father of the faithful, but as a God of grace, as a God of promise. There were no thunderings and lightnings, no blackness, darkness and tempest surrounding the Blessed One when He appeared unto Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, or when He partook of his hospitality in the plains of Mamre. It was always God's delight to have His people near Him, enjoying the precious fruits of His grace, rather than afar off, reaping the bitter fruits of their works. This latter was simply the result of man's legal utterance, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Up to the fatal moment in the which these words were spoken, God had been speaking and acting in the same unqualified grace toward the seed of Abraham as He had toward that favored patriarch himself. But when Israel undertook to *do*, it was needful to put them thoroughly to the test. This was done by the law.

But, it may be asked, was it not always God's purpose to give the law? Was it not necessary? Is it not designed to be the abiding rule of man's conduct — the statement of his duty to God and man, the divine summary and embodiment of his righteousness? To all this we reply, Most surely God knew from the beginning what He would do. Moreover, in His infinite wisdom He overruled man's legal folly and made use of the law to raise the great question of righteousness and prove whether it was possible for man to work out a righteousness which could be accepted. But what was the result? Did man ever get righteousness by keeping the ten commandments? Never. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3: 20). Again, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3: 10-11).

What, then, was the object of the law? Why was it given? What was its effect? "The law entered that the offense might abound" (Rom. 5: 20). "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was

added because of transgressions” (Gal. 3: 19). “The law worketh wrath” (Rom. 4: 15).

Thus Scripture answers our three questions in the plainest possible manner. Not only so, it settles the entire law question in such a way as to remove every difficulty and every cloud from the mind that will submit absolutely to the authority of the Word.

When we sat down to pen this brief article, we had no thought whatever of entering on the domain of theology. It was merely our purpose to present to the heart and mind of the reader the striking lesson taught by the two altars in Exodus 20 — the altar of earth and the altar of hewn stone. In the former we have the very spirit of the dispensation of grace; in the latter the spirit of the dispensation of law. God wanted man to be near Him. Therefore He would have an altar of earth. In other words, man was to approach God without any efforts or doings of his own. “If thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone (or, as the margin reads, “build them with hewing”): for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

Oh! that men would only consider these things! How little are they understood! Man will be doing. He will lift up his tool in the building of his altar; the result is pollution. He will ascend by steps; the result is discovered nakedness. Thus it must be because man is a sinner and his very best works can only issue in pollution and nakedness.

One thing is certain. *God does not record His Name in any place where man's doings are set up as the basis of worship.* This truth shines with heavenly luster on every page of the sacred Volume, and it shines where we should least of all have expected to find it — at the close of Exodus 20. It is something perfectly wonderful, amid the thunderings of Mount Sinai, to catch such heavenly words as these, “In all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” These are words of purest grace, words flowing from the very heart of God, words expressing the very nature and character of God. “I will come unto thee.” Precious words! May they sink down into our hearts and there

abide! May it be our aim and object ever to be found worshipping in that place where God records His Name, and where, instead of the nakedness and pollution which ever mark the efforts of man, we have the infinite preciousness of the grace of God and the fullness and excellency of Christ in His Person and work!

Exodus 21: 1-6; John 13: 1-10; Luke 12: 37.

The Ministry of Christ Past, Present, and Future.

"For even the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

It is very necessary to retire from all thoughts about our service to the Lord, and our work for Him, and to have our hearts occupied with His service toward us. And when I say this, you will not suppose for a moment that it is my desire or thought to weaken in any heart in this assembly, in the smallest degree, the desire to work for Christ, whatever sphere He may open for you, or according to whatever gift He may have bestowed upon you. Quite the reverse; indeed, I would seek in every way to strengthen and intensify that desire. But then one knows, both from experience and observation, that we may be so occupied with our work and our services that our hearts may lose the sense of what Christ is toward us in His marvellous character as a servant.

Here let me say that my immediate thesis is the Lord Jesus as the servant of His people's necessities. That is the field into which we are introduced by these Scriptures. The Lord Jesus is the servant of the soul's necessities in every stage of its history, from first to last — from the depths of your ruin and degradation as sinners, in all your weakness and failure as saints from day to day, until He plants you in the joys of His own kingdom. And His services will not end there; for, as we read in Luke 12: 37, He will gird Himself, and serve us in the glory. Thus His work as a servant overlaps the whole of the soul's history, past, present, and future. He has served us in the past, He is serving us now, and He will serve us forever. And here allow me to say that the line of truth which I have to bring before you is of a directly individual character. We were speaking, previously, of the truth with respect to our corporate condition and character, and therefore I feel all the more free on this occasion to enter upon what is more directly personal — to speak of truth which bears directly on the soul's individual condition and wants. And I would ask you to place yourselves, so far as through grace you can, in all simplicity and reality, straight in view of this theme — Christ the servant of

our necessities. It is possible there may be souls who want to begin at the very beginning with this most precious theme. They want to know Christ as the One who came into this world to serve them in all their deep and varied need as lost, self-destroyed, guilty, hell-deserving sinners. If there be any such, I would ask them to ponder deeply that verse which I have read, "The Son of Man is come to serve and to give." This is a divine reality. Jesus came into this world to meet our need, to serve us in all that in which we need His precious service, and to give His life a ransom for many; to serve us by bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, and working out a full and an eternal salvation. He did not come to get did not come to take — He did not come to be at ministered to did not come to be gazed at came to be used; and therefore, while the soul that is exercised may be raising this harassing question, "What can I do for the Lord?" the answer is, "You must pause and see and believe what the Lord has done for you. You must stand still and see the salvation of God." Remember those words of divine and evangelistic sweetness. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4: 5). You can never intelligently or properly serve Christ until you know and believe how He has served you. You must cease your restless doings, and rest in a divinely accomplished work.

Then but not until then, will you be able to start on a career of Christian service. It is most necessary for all anxious souls to understand that all true Christian service begins with the possession of eternal life, and is rendered in the power of the Holy Ghost, the indwelling Spirit, in the light and on the authority of holy Scripture. This is the divine idea of Christian work and service.

Now, though the primary object is for those who are saints of God, who have set out on their course, still I do not think it would be according to the heart and sympathies of Christ to overlook the fact that there may be some soul that wants, as I said, just to begin at the very beginning with this precious mystery — Christ the servant; that have never taken the attitude of simple repose in Christ's finished work. They have, it may be, begun to think of their soul's salvation, to think about eternity; but they are occupied with the thought that the Lord is claiming something from them: "I must do this, I must

do that, and I must do the other." Now, if such there be, I repeat, with deepest earnestness, you must cease altogether from your own doings, cease from your own reasonings, cease from your own feelings; because, be assured of it, it is neither feeling nor thinking nor reasoning nor doing at all, but it is pausing and gazing. It is hearing and believing. It is looking off from yourselves and your service to Christ and His service. It is ceasing from your restless and worthless doings, and reposing in full, unquestioning confidence in the one offering of Jesus Christ, which has perfectly satisfied and perfectly glorified God as to the great question of your sin and guilt. Here lies the divine secret of peace — peace in Jesus — peace with God — eternal peace. Nothing will ever be right till you get on this ground. If you are occupied with your doings for Christ, you will never get peace; but if you will only take God at His word, and rest in His Christ, you shall possess a peace which no power of earth or hell can ever disturb.

Now, I ask you, before I proceed, this question, Is there a heart that has not yet rested here? Is there a heart that will say, I am not satisfied with Christ's service; I cannot rest in His work? What! The Son of God has stooped to serve you. The One who made you, the One who gave you life and breath and all things, the One to whom all are responsible, He has stooped to become your servant. It is not a question of asking you to do any thing, or asking you to give any thing, because — mark those words — they are words which sweep all through the history of the Son of Man — they are words which, in all their length and breadth and fullness, you can take up and use as if you were the only object of this service in the world — "The Son of Man is come to serve and to give." He is not come to get; He is not come to ask.

The legal mind leads you to think that God is an exactor — that He is making demands upon you — that He wants your services in one way or another. But oh, remember, that your first great business, your primary and all-important work, is to believe in Jesus — to rest sweetly in Him, and in what He has done for you on the cross, and in what He is doing for you on the throne. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." You remember the interesting question of the Psalmist — a question asked when his

eye rested on the magnitude and multitude of Jehovah's benefits — "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?" What is the reply? "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord."

Is this the way to "render unto the Lord"? Yes, this is just the way that gratifies and glorifies Him. If you really want to render, you must take. Take what? "The cup of salvation" — a full and brimming cup, most surely; and as you drink of that cup, as the glories of God's salvation shine in the vision of your soul, then will streams of living praise flow from your grateful heart. And you know He says, "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth Me."

In a word, then, you must, first of all, allow your soul to dwell upon the marvellous mystery of Christ's service toward you in all the depth of your need; and the more you dwell upon that, the more will you be in the true attitude to serve Him.

Take another striking illustration. When David, as you remember, in that remarkable passage in the second book of Samuel (chap. 7), sat in his house of cedar, and looked around at all that God had done for him, he said, "I must rise and build a house."

Immediately the prophet was dispatched to David to correct him on this point: "You shall not build Me a house, but I will build you a house." You must reverse the matter. God wants you to sit down and gaze yet more fully and intently upon His actings on your behalf. He wants you to look, not only at the past and the present, but to look on into the bright future; to see your entire history overlapped by His own magnificent grace.

And what was the effect of all this upon the heart of David? We have the answer in that one pithy statement: "Then went King David in, and sat before the Lord, and said, 'Who am I?' " Mark the attitude, and ponder the question. They are full of deep meaning. "He sat." This is rest and sweet repose. He wanted to go to work too soon. No, says God, you must sit down and look at My work, and trace My actings on your behalf in the past, the present, and the future.

And then the question, Who am I?" In this we see the blessed fact that self was for the moment lost sight of. It was flung into the shade by the lustre of divine revelation. Self and its poor little actings were set aside by the glory of God and the rich magnificence of His actings on behalf of His servant.

Now, some might have thought that David was an active, useful man when he was rising to take the trowel to build the house; and they might have thought him a good-for-nothing man to be sitting still when there was work to be done. But, let us remember that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. He prizes our worship much more highly than our work. Indeed, it is only the true and intelligent worshiper that can be a true and intelligent workman. No doubt God most graciously accepts our poor services, even stamped as they so often are with mistakes of all sorts. But when it becomes a question of the comparative value of service and worship, the former must give place to the latter; and we know that when our brief span of working time shall have expired, our eternity of worship shall begin. Sweet thought!

And let me further remark, ere leaving this part of our subject, that no one need fear in the least that the practical effect of what I have been saying will be to cripple your service, or lead you to fold your arms in culpable idleness or cold indifference. The very reverse is the case, as you may see in the history of David himself. Study at your leisure 1 Chronicles 28 - 29. There you have a splendid presentation of service — most triumphant answer to all who would place work before worship. There you see, as it were King David rising from the attitude of worshiper into that of a workman, and making ample provision for the building of that very house of which he was not allowed to set one stone upon another.

And not only does he make provision according to the claims of holiness, but, as he says "Because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, overlay the walls of the house." In other words, as we should express it, out of his own private purse, he gave the princely sum of

over sixteen millions as a free gift toward the house which was to be reared by the hand of another. This, as he informs us, was "over and above what he had prepared for the holy house which latter greatly exceeded the amount of England's national debt. Thus we see that it is the true worshiper to that makes the effective servant. It is when we have sat and gazed on the actings of Christ for us that we are enabled in any small degree to act for Him. And then, too, we shall be able to say with David, as he surveyed the untold wealth prepared for the house of God, "It is all Thine, and of Thine own have we given Thee."

But we must now turn for a few moments to the opening paragraph of Exodus 21 — "If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out say himself And If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him forever."

Here, then, we have one of the shadows of good things to come — a shadow or figure of the True Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, that blessed One who loved the Church and gave Himself for it. The Hebrew servant, having served the legal time, was perfectly free to go out; but he loved his wife and his children, and that, too, with such a love as led him to surrender his own personal liberty for their sakes. He proved his love for them by sacrificing himself. He might have gone forth and enjoyed his freedom, but what of them? How could he leave them behind? Impossible. He loved them too well for that; and hence he deliberately walked to the door-post, and there, in the presence of the judges, had his ear bored in token of perpetual service.

This was love indeed. There was no mistake about it. The wife and each child, as they gazed ever after on that bored ear, could read the touching and powerful proof of the love of that servant's heart.

Here is something for the heart to dwell upon — yea, something over which the heart may well break itself. We see in this Old Testament type the everlasting Lover of our souls — Jesus, the true servant. You remember that remarkable occasion in our Lord's life when He was setting before His disciples the solemn fact of His approaching cross and passion. You will find it in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Mark: "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him." Peter would fain, though he knew it not, have interrupted the True Servant in His movement to the door-post. He would have Him pity Himself, and maintain His own personal freedom. But oh, hearken to the withering rebuke administered to the very man who just before had made such a fine confession of Christ! "But when he had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.' "

Mark the action. "He turned and looked on His disciples," as though He would say, If I harken to your counsel, Peter — if I pity Myself — if I retreat from that cross which lies before Me, then what is to become of these? It is the Hebrew servant saying, "I love my wife, I love my children, I will not go out free."

It is of the very last possible importance for us to see that there was no necessity whatever laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ to walk to the cross; there was no necessity whatever laid upon Him to leave the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity and come down here; and when He had come down into this world, and taken perfect humanity upon Him, there was no necessity laid upon Him that He should have gone to the cross; for at any moment during the whole of His blessed history, from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, He might have gone back to where He came from. Death had no claim upon Him. The prince of this world came and had nothing in Him. He could say, speaking of His life, "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). And on His way from the garden to the cross we hear Him saying, "Thinkest

thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" And may we not say there was much more truth than the utterers were aware of in these accents of mockery which fell on the blessed Saviour's ear as He hung on the cross — "He saved others; Himself He cannot save"? But they might have said, Himself He will not save.

Ah, no! blessed forever be His name! He did not pity or spare Himself, but He pitied us. He beheld us in our hopeless ruin, guilt, misery, and danger. He saw that there was no eye to pity, no arm to save; and — all praise to His matchless name! — He laid aside His glory, came down into this wretched world, became a man, that as a man He might, by the sacrifice of Himself, deliver us from the lake of fire, and associate us with Himself on the new and eternal ground of accomplished redemption, in the power of resurrection-life, according to the eternal counsels of God, and to the praise of His glory.

Now, we cannot possibly overestimate the importance of dwelling upon the fact that there was no necessity whatever laid upon our blessed Lord Jesus Christ to die on the cross, and to endure the wrath of God. Neither in His person, in His nature, nor in His relations was He obnoxious to death. He was God over all, blessed forever. He was the Eternal Son of God. And in His human nature He was pure, spotless, sinless, perfect. He knew no sin. He did always and only the things that please God. He glorified Him, and finished His work; and He has saved us in such a way as to glorify God in the most wonderful manner. He was, to use the language of our type, free to go out by Himself; but ah, had He done so, your place and mine must inevitably have been the lake of fire forever.

To all this the Holy Ghost delights to bear testimony, as one of our own poets has sweetly sung:

And, Lord, Thy perfect fitness

To do a Saviour's part,

The Holy Ghost doth witness

To each believer's heart.

Most true: and we might with equal truth say, "His fitness to do a servant's part," because it was the very height of His glory, the very dignity of His person; it was the glory whence He had descended, that enabled Him to stoop down to the very depths of their condition, that He has not a necessity — no, not one — in the deepest range of His people's history, or in the lowest depths of their condition, that He has not reached in His marvellous character and His divine ministry as the servant of His peoples necessities.

Brethren, let us never forget this. Nay, rather let us constantly cherish in our hearts the most grateful remembrance of it. The more we dwell upon the height of Christ's personal glory, the more fully we shall see the depths of His humiliation. The more profoundly we meditate upon the glory of what He was, the more we must be arrested by the grace of what He became. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

Who can measure the heights and the depths of those two words, "rich" and "poor," in their application to our adorable Lord and Saviour? No created intelligence can fathom them; but most assuredly we should cultivate the habit of dwelling upon the love that shines all along the pathway of the divine Servant as He walked to the cross for us. It is as we dwell upon His love to us that our hearts shall be drawn out by the Holy Ghost in the power of responsive love to Him. "The love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should no henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (1 Cor. 5: 14-15).

II. Having thus glanced at our Lord's service toward us in the past, let us look for a few moments at His present service — at what He is now doing for us continually in the presence of God. This we have most blessedly presented to us in John 13. The same Precious grace shines in this as in all that on which we have been dwelling. If we look back The past, we behold the Perfect Servant nailed to the cross for us, if we look up to the throne now, we behold Him girded

for us, no only according to our present need, but according to the perfect love of His love to the Father, His love to the Church His love to each individual believe from the beginning to the end of time.

"Now before the feast of the Passover den Jesus knew that His hour was come that that He should depart out of this world unto the Father having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end And during supper [see Greeks the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." Here, then, we have a most marvellous presentation of Christ's present service toward "His OWN which are in the world." There is something peculiarly precious in the expression, His own." It brings us so very near to the heart of Christ. It is so sweet to think that He can look at such poor, feeble, failing creatures as we are, and say, They are Mine. It matters not what others may think about them; they belong to Me, and I must have them in a condition worthy of the place whence I came, and whither I am going. This is ineffably precious and edifying for our souls. It was in the sense of His personal glory, in the consciousness that He had come I from God and was going to God, that He could stoop down and wash His people's feet. There was nothing, could be nothing, higher than the place whence Jesus had come; there was nothing, could be nothing, lower than the defiled feet of His disciples: but, blessed and praised forever be His name! He fills up in His own divine person and marvellous service every point between those two extremes. He can lay one hand on the throne of God, and the other on our feet, and be Himself the divine and eternal link between.

Now, there are three things in this Scripture which I am anxious to put clearly before you. In the first place, we have the special action of our Lord toward His own in the world; secondly, the spring of that action; and thirdly, the measure of the action: the action, its spring, and its measure. 1. And first, the action itself. You will bear

in mind that what we have presented here is not "the washing of regeneration." That pertains to the first stage of our Lord's service on our behalf. "His own which are in the world" — all who belong to that highly privileged class (and that is simply all who believe in His name) have passed through that great washing, in virtue of which Christ can pronounce them "clean every whit."

There is not a spot or a stain upon the very feeblest of that blessed number whom He calls "His own." "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." If a single spot could be detected on one of Christ's own, it would be a dishonour cast upon Him, inasmuch as He has washed us from all our guilt according to the perfection of His work as the Servant of our need, and, far above all, the Servant of the eternal counsels, purposes, and glory of God. He found us clean never a whit, and He has made us "clean every whit."

This is the washing of regeneration, which is never repeated. We have a figure of this in the case of the priests of the Mosaic economy. On the great day of their inauguration they were washed in water. This action was never repeated. But after this, from day to day, in order to fit them for the daily discharge of their priestly functions, they had to wash their hands and their feet in the brazen laver in the tabernacle, or the brazen sea in the temple. This daily washing is the figure of the action in John 13. The two washings, being distinct, must never be confounded; and being intimately connected, must never be separated. The washing of regeneration is divinely and eternally complete: the washing of sanctification is being divinely and continually carried on. The former is never repeated; the latter is never interrupted. That gives us a part in Christ, of which nothing can rob us; and this gives us a part with Christ, of which any thing may deprive us. The one is the basis of our eternal life; the other is the ground of our daily communion.

See that you understand the meaning of having your feet washed, moment by moment, by the hands of that blessed One who is girded as the divine Servant of your present need. It is utterly impossible for any one to overestimate the importance of this work; but we may at least gather something of its value from our Lord's words to Peter; for Peter, like ourselves, alas! was very far from

seizing the full significance of what his Lord was doing. "Then cometh He to Simon Peter; and Peter saith unto Him, 'Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.' Peter saith unto Him, 'Thou shalt never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.'"

Here is the grand point — "part with Me." The washing of regeneration gives us a part in Christ: the daily washing of sanctification gives us a part with Christ. In order to full, intelligent, happy communion, we must have a clean conscience, and clean feet. The blood of atonement secures the former; the water of purification maintains the other. But both the blood and the water flowed from a crucified Christ. The death of Christ is the necessary basis of every thing. He died to make us clean; He lives to keep us clean. We are made as clean as His death can make us; we are kept as clean as His life can keep us.

And, be it remembered, this marvellous ministry of Christ on our behalf never ceases. He ever liveth to act for us on high, and to act on us and in us by His Word and Spirit. He speaks to God for us, and He speaks to us for God. He came from God, and travelled down to the profoundest depths of our need. He has gone back to God, to bear us ever on His heart, to meet our daily need, and to maintain us in the integrity of the position and relationship into which He has introduced us.

This is replete with solid comfort for the soul. We are passing through a defiling world, where we are constantly liable to contract evils of one kind or another which, though they cannot touch our eternal life, can very seriously affect our communion. It is impossible for us to tread the sanctuary of the divine presence with soiled feet; and hence the deep and unspeakable blessedness of having One ever in the presence of God for us — One who, having been in this scene knows its true character; and One who, having come from God, and gone back to Him, knows the full extent of His claims, and all that is needful to fit us for fellowship with Him. The provision is divinely perfect. Sin or uncleanness can never be found in the presence of God. If we can make light of either the one or the other, God cannot and will not. The holiness that shines in the

demand for purity is as bright as the grace that provides it. Grace has made the provision but holiness demands the application thereof. The goodness of God provided a laver for the priests of old, but the holiness of God demanded that the priests should use that laver. The great washing of inauguration introduced them to the office of the priesthood; the washing in the laver fitted them for the duties of that office. How could acceptable priestly service be discharged with unclean hands? Impossible.

And we may say it is as impossible that we can walk in the pathway of holiness if our feet are not washed and wiped by that blessed One who has girded Himself to serve us in this matter perpetually.

All this is divinely simple. There are two links in Christianity; namely, the link of eternal life, which can never be snapped by any thing; and the link of personal communion which can be snapped in a moment by the weight of a feather. Now, it is as our ways are cleansed by the holy action of the Word, through the Holy Ghost, that our communion is maintained in its unbroken integrity. But if I am afraid to face the Word of God or if I am wilfully refusing its action, how can I enjoy communion with God?

I am not speaking now of ignorance of the Word of God. The Lord bears with a wonderful amount of ignorance in us — far more than we could bear with in one another. I do not now refer to the question of ignorance. But suppose a case. A young person entered these walls a few weeks ago, and took her seat on one of these benches. She was dressed out in all the fashion of this world — her head adorned with feathers and flowers, and her fingers with jewels. Her heart full of vanity and folly. Here the grace of God met her in all its fullness and freeness. The arrow of divine conviction entered her soul. She was broken down under the mighty power of the Word, in the hands of the Holy Ghost. She was brought to repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. She was saved, there and then, and left the place rejoicing in a full salvation. This joy continued for many days. She was engrossed with her newly found treasure. She never thought about her feathers, her flowers, or her jewels. True, she continued to wear them, simply because she as yet saw nothing wrong in so doing. She knew not as yet that there was

so much as a single sentence in the Word of God bearing upon such things.

Brethren, let me just remind you that we should be prepared for such a case as this, and be prepared to meet it. Some of us, I fear, have but little wisdom or patience to deal with cases of this type. We are in undue haste to enter upon what I may call the stripping process. This is a mistake. We must allow time for the hidden virtues of the kingdom of God to develop themselves. We must not attempt to reduce the Christian assembly into a place in which a certain livery is adopted. This will never do. We really cannot reduce all to a dead level. We must allow the Word of God to act on the life which the Spirit of God has implanted. I do nothing but mischief to people if I get them to adopt a certain style of dress merely at my suggestion. The grand thing is to allow the kingdom of God to assert its holy sway over the entire character. This is to His glory and reduce all to a dead level.

.....

Let us pursue our case. Our young friend, in the course of her reading, is arrested by the following pointed passage: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2: 9-10). And again, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3: 3-4).

Now, here, we have illustrated for us the present ministry of Christ-the action of the Word upon the soul-the application of the basin to the feet-the washing of water by the Word. It is Jesus stooping down to wash the feet of this young disciple. The question is, How will she receive the action? Will she resist it, or yield to it? Will she push away the basin? Will she refuse the gracious ministry? "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

This is very solemn, and it demands our most serious attention. Next in moral importance to having the conscience purged by the blood of Christ stands this cleansing of our ways by the action of the Word, through the power of the Holy Ghost. The former gives us a part in Christ; the latter, a part with Christ. That is never repeated; this must never be interrupted. If we really desire fellowship with Christ, we must allow Him to wash our feet moment by moment. We cannot tread the pure precincts of the sanctuary of God with defiled feet any more than we can enter them with a defiled conscience.

Hence, therefore, let us look well to it that we have our ways continually submitted to the purifying action of the precious Word of God. Let us put away every thing which that Word condemns; let us abandon every position and every association and every practice which that Word condemns, that so our holy fellowship with Christ may be maintained in its freshness and integrity. Nothing is more dangerous than to trifle with evil in any shape or form. Ignorance God can and does most graciously bear with, but the wilful resistance of His Word in any one point is sure to lead to disastrous results. The heart becomes hardened, the conscience seared, the moral sense blunted, and the whole moral being gets into a most deplorable condition. We get away from the Lord, and make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. May the Lord keep us near to Himself, walking with Him in tenderness of conscience and uprightness of heart. May His Word ever tell in living formative power upon our souls, that so our way be cleansed according to the claims of the sanctuary of God.

2 But let us now inquire for a moment into the spring of this action on which we have been dwelling. This is presented with touching sweetness and power in the first verse of John 13 — "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

Here, then, we have the mighty spring of Christ's present ministry. It is the changeless love of His heart — a love that was stronger than death, and which many waters could not quench. "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph.

5: 25-26). This is the blessed basis and the motive — spring of that marvellous ministry which our Lord Jesus Christ is now carrying on for us and toward us. He knew what He was undertaking when He uttered those words in the fortieth Psalm, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." He knew what it would cost Him when He took up our case. But His love was and is divinely equal to all. We need not be afraid of exhausting that love which triumphed over all the unutterable horrors of Calvary, and went down under the deep and dark waters of death and judgement. We may at times feel ashamed to have so often to bring our defiled feet to that blessed One to cleanse them; but His love is equal to all, and that love is the spring of His precious and indispensable ministry.

It is a common saying that love is blind, but I look upon it as a libel upon love. Most certainly it does not and could not apply to the love of Christ. He knew all that was in us, and He knows now all our ways and all our weakness and all our follies; but He loves us notwithstanding all, and in the power of that love He acts toward us in order to deliver us from all that He sees in us and about us which would hinder our holy fellowship with the Father and with His Son.

Of what use would a blind love be to you or to me? Surely, none whatever. How could we ever repose in a love which only acted toward us in ignorance of our blots and blemishes! Impossible. What we want is a love superior to all our imperfections, and a love that can deliver us from them. This love we have in

Christ blessed be His name! It is a love that, however it may expose us to ourselves, will never expose us to another. It is a love that comes to us with the basin and towel, and stoops down in infinite tenderness and lowly, matchless grace to wash away every soil, and give us the comfortable sense of being "clean every whit." This is the love which you and I bed, and this is the love which we have found in divine fullness and power in the heart of that perfect Servant who is girded for us ever before the throne.

"Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them" — how long? As long as they behaved themselves, and walked with soiled feet? Ah, no! this would never do for such as we. "He loved them unto the end." Precious perfect, divine, everlasting love! a love

that overlaps and underlies and outlives our blots and blemishes, our failings and falterings, our wants and weaknesses, our wanderings and waywardness; a love that is come to us armed with all that our condition could possibly demand; a love that will never cease to act for us and toward us and in us, until it presents us in unblemished perfectness before the throne of God. And now one word as to the measure of Christ's present action for us and toward us. This is a point of unspeakable value and importance. It is essential for us to know that whether it be a question of Christ's service for us in the past or His present service the measure of both the one and the other is and can be nothing less than the claims of the sanctuary, the throne, and the nature of God. We might suppose that the measure would be our necessities, but this could never do. If we think of Christ's atoning work, we know, and rejoice to know, His precious work has done very much more than meet the deepest measure of our necessities as sinners. Blessed be God! the work of the cross has divinely met all the claims of God. It could never give solid peace our souls merely to know that the very highest claims of human conscience had been met by the atoning death of Christ. We must be assured on divine authority that the highest claims of the government, the character the nature, and the glory of God have all been perfectly met by the precious work of Christ.

Thus it is through infinite grace, and here every divinely exercised soul can find settled and eternal peace. Nor is it otherwise in respect to Christ's present work for us. It could never satisfy our souls to be told that that work is measured by our very deepest need. That need is met, no doubt; but it is because Christ's present ministry goes far beyond that need, and reaches to, and satisfies the claims of, the sanctuary of God.

Unspeakable mercy! Here we may rest in perfect tranquillity. We have One on high undertaking for us, ever living in the presence of God for us; One who not only knows our necessities, but knows also the claims of God. He knows what this scene is through which we are passing, and He knows what that scene is into which He has entered; and, all praise to His name! He meets in His own perfect ministry both the one and the other. He must needs meet all our

claims since He meets all God's claims, for the less must ever be included in the greater.

What solid comfort is here! What unruffled repose! We have One in the presence of God for us, in whose hands all our affairs are perfectly, because divinely, safe. They can never fall through, never go wrong. We may say that ere ever the very weakest of those whom Christ calls "His own in the world" can fail, Christ Himself must fail, and that can be never. His own are as safe as Himself.

What a grand reality! With what perfect confidence may we refer every objector, every accuser, every opposer, to this blessed manager! And what folly, on our part, to attempt to answer such ourselves! Oh, may we learn to lean more confidently on that blessed One who thus presents Himself before our souls as the girded servant of our deep and manifold necessities. May we prize His precious ministry more and more — His ministry for us, His ministry to us. May we repose more sweetly in the assurance that He is speaking to the Father for us, in all our failures, in all our shortcomings, in all our sins.

May we remember, for our exceeding comfort, that even before we slip, He has been pleading for us, as He pleaded for Peter. "I have prayed for thee," said the loving One, "that thy faith fail not." Oh, the matchless grace of these words! He did not pray that Peter might not fall, but that, having fallen, his confidence might not give way, his faith might not fail. Thus, too, He pleads for us, and thus we are sustained, and thus we are restored when we fall, else we should very speedily go from bad to worse, and make shipwreck altogether. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." We are sustained by His precious and powerful ministry every moment. We could not stand for a single hour without Him.

Things are continually turning up which would prove destructive of our fellowship, if we had not that blessed One acting for us, whose intervention on our behalf never ceases. He knows not only our need, but He knows what the sanctuary demands; and not only does He know it, but He provides for it, according to His own infinite perfectness and acceptance before God, meeting His people's necessities.

Now, there are some people who have got such a one-sided notion of the standing of the believer, that they throw the Lord's priestly ministry overboard altogether. I say it is one-sided, and there is nothing more dangerous than one-sided truth — nothing. I would far rather see a man going through the length and breadth of London publishing palpable error, such as the simplest mind could detect. I would have far less apprehension of the mischievous result of his ministry than of the teaching of a man who takes up one side of a truth, and presses it in such a way as to interfere with some other truth.

Now, there is an adjusting power in the truth of God — an adjusting power in Scripture that constitutes one of its brightest moral glories; and hence we find that while the Word of God most fully and blessedly establishes the truth that the believer stands complete in Christ, justified from all things, accepted in the Beloved, "clean every whit," it, at the same time with equal clearness and fullness, sets forth the fact that the believer is, in himself, a poor feeble creature, exposed to manifold snares, temptations, and hostile influences; liable at any moment to fall into error and evil; utterly unable to keep himself, or to grapple with the difficulties and dangers which surround him; liable at any moment to contract defilement, which would unfit him for the holy fellowship and worship of the sanctuary.

How, then, are all those things to be met? How is the Christian to be kept in the face of such things? Having an evil nature, a crafty foe, and a hostile world to cope with, how is he to get on? How is he to be kept? How is he to be restored if he wanders? How is he to be lifted up if he falls? The answer to all these questions is found in that ever-precious sentence of inspiration, "He ever liveth to make intercession for us"; and again, "He is able to save to the uttermost"; and again, "We shall be saved by His life"; and again, "Because I live, ye shall live also"; and again, "We have an advocate with the Father."

How the heart delights to give forth and to ponder over such utterances as these! They are marrow and fatness to the soul. How can any one, in the face of such passages — to say nothing of his own necessary experiences as to himself and his surroundings —

think of calling in question the grand foundation-truth of the priesthood of Christ, in its application to believers now? I can only say, I know not. But alas! there is no accounting for the depths of error into which we may fall, if we allow our minds to work, and get away from the direct authority of holy Scripture. And we may truly say that a most palpable proof of our need of the intercession of Christ is to be found in the sad fact that any of His servants should be found to deny it.

I shall add no more on this point, save to warn all the Lord's dear people against the terrible error of denying our continual need of the priestly ministry, the precious intercession and all-prevailing advocacy of our Lord Jesus Christ — an error second only to the denial of His atoning work. For most surely our need of His priesthood is second only to our need of His atoning blood.

III. Having then briefly, and, alas! imperfectly, glanced at our Lord's ministry in the past and in the present, we cannot close without a reference to His ministry in the future. Some may feel disposed to say, I do not understand how our Lord can ever be found serving us in the future. I can understand His serving us now on the throne, but how He is to serve us in the kingdom is, I confess, beyond me.

No doubt it is most marvellous, and had we not His own veritable words for it, we might well hesitate in our statement of the fact that our Lord Christ shall serve His people in the brightness of the glory. But let us hear what He Himself saith to us. Turn for a moment to Luke 12: 35: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. "

This is distinct and unmistakable. Most marvellous, no doubt, but as plain as it is marvellous. Christ will serve us in the kingdom. He will serve us forever. His ministry overlaps our entire history. It reaches down to the very deepest depths of our need as sinners, and

up to the very loftiest heights of the glory. It goes back to the past, it covers the present, and it stretches away into the boundless future. Blessed be His name! He loves to serve us, and He gives us the assurance that the very moment, as it were, that He enters upon the glory of His own kingdom, He will gratify His loving heart by making us sit down amid the very brightness of that glory, and there serving us in the same love that has characterised His service from the very first. All praise and eternal homage to His peerless name!

But mark another thing in this twelfth chapter of Luke. At the forty-first verse Peter puts the question, "'Lord, speakest Thou this parable unto us, or even to all?'" And the Lord said, "'Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.'"

Thus we have two things, namely, "watching" and "doing." Which does Christ value most? The former, unquestionably, as is proved by the higher reward attached to it. To have Christ serving us in the glory is something far beyond any position which He may in His goodness assign to us.

Let us, then, ever bear in mind, brethren, that our blessed Lord values, above all things, that loving attitude of the heart which expresses itself by watching for His return. No doubt it is blessed and important to be found "doing" also, whatever He gives us to do, whether it be sweeping a crossing or evangelising a nation; He will not allow the very smallest act of service to go unrequited. It is not that He values service less, but He values watching more, and we can understand this; even nature itself will teach it to us. Suppose the head of a family is absent from home; the servants are told to have things in readiness for his return, and each will be found doing his or her appointed work. They will say, Master is coming home; we must see and have all square and right for him. This is as it should be; but is there not something far deeper and higher than this? Is there not something that answers to the heart of that absent one? Surely there is; there is the earnest longing of an affectionate

wife, without which the best ordered house would be but a poor, cold, cheerless thing to come back to.

Thus it is, be assured of it, with our beloved absent Lord. He prizes, above all things, the affectionate, earnest longings of our hearts to see His face. Something of what shone in Mephibosheth, when he said to David, "Let him take all, seeing my lord the king is come in peace." Oh, let us cultivate more of this, dearly beloved in the Lord; let us see to it that we are of those who love the appearing of our adorable Lord and Saviour! May the cry of our hearts be continually, "Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?"

Will this make us deficient in service? The very reverse. Nay it is this which will give the true spring to all service, and impart a holy fragrance to the very smallest act which may be done. Whereas, if this deep personal affection be lacking, the most splendid and showy acts of service are as nothing to the heart of Jesus. The two mites of the widow were more precious to Christ than the most princely gifts of heartless offerers. Show me a heart that is watching for Christ, and I will show you a pair of hands occupied for Him in some way or another. It does not matter in the least what we are doing, provided it be the very thing which our Lord has given us to do, and there is nothing that will so quickly enable us to know what service to do as a loving heart. There is an instinct, a tact about true love, that leads it to find out at once what is grateful to its object.

This is what is wanting, brethren. There may be a vast amount of busy activity — of running hither and thither — of coming and going but if the heart be not occupied with Christ, the hands and feet and head are little worth. He, blessed forever be His name! has given us a whole heart, and nothing can satisfy Him in return but a whole heart from us. His entire service — past, present, and future — is the fruit of His perfect love; and nothing can meet His desire, with respect to us, save a heart responsive in its affections to Him. And where there is this, it will express itself in an anxious, earnest longing for His coming. "Blessed are those servants, whom their lord when he cometh shall find watching."

May the eternal Spirit fill our hearts with genuine love to the Person of our own adorable Lord and Saviour; that so our one grand

and undivided purpose may be to live for Him in this scene from which He has been cast out, and to wait for that moment when we shall see Him as He is, and be like Him and with Him forever.

Exodus 26: 4

“LOOPS OF BLUE”

In contemplating the structure of the tabernacle in the wilderness, we may observe what an important place was assigned to the “loops of blue.” By means of them and the “taches of gold,” the curtains were joined together and the manifested unity of the whole structure preserved. These loops and taches might seem to be very insignificant and unimportant, but without them, there could have been no unity. The curtains, however beautiful in themselves, would have hung apart from each other, and thus one grand feature of the manifestation would have been lost.

Looking at the tabernacle as a figure of Christ, as surely we may, we can easily trace the beauty and significance of those “loops of blue and taches of gold.” They typified that perfect unity and consistency in the character and ways of “the Man Christ Jesus” which were the result of His heavenly grace and divine energy. In the life of the blessed Lord Jesus, and in all the scenes and circumstances of that life, we not only see each distinct phase and feature perfect in itself, but also a perfect combination of all those phases and features by the power of that which was heavenly and divine in Him. The curtains of the true Tabernacle were not only beautiful in themselves, but they were beautifully combined — exquisitely linked together by means of those “loops of blue and taches of gold” which can only be discerned and appreciated by those who are in some measure instructed in the holy mysteries of the sanctuary.

And let me add that what is true of the divine Living Word is equally true of the divine written Word. The spiritual student of Holy Scripture will readily discern the “loops of blue and taches of gold.” This is only what we might expect. The Living Word is the divine embodiment of the written Word, and the written Word is the divine transcript of the Living Word. Hence, we may look for the same heavenly unity, the same divine consistency, the same rare and exquisite combination in both the one and the other. It would be pleasant and profitable to trace the various illustrations of the loops

and taches through the Word of God, but I have merely time and space for a brief fragment. I will give an example or two from the written Word which may lead my reader to study the subject for himself.

In 1 Corinthians 16 we have a lovely and practical illustration of our subject. Verse 13 says, "Quit you like men, be strong." Here we have one fine feature of the Christian character — that manly strength which is so desirable. But this, if taken by itself, might easily degenerate into a rough, rude, high-handed way of dealing with others, the very opposite of what we find in our divine Exemplar. Hence the Spirit in the apostle forms a loop of blue, and by means of a golden tach links on to this manly strength another feature which is so needful — love. "Let all your things be done with love." Most precious combination! Strength and love. Love and strength. If you untie this heavenly loop you will either have a high, haughty, inconsiderate style, or a soft, pliable, enfeebled mode of acting which will sacrifice everything for peace and quietness.

Again, look at that noble definition of pure religion given at the close of James 2. There the apostle uses the loop and tach to connect together the two phases of divine religion. "To visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction" is looped with unspotted separation from the world. In other words, active benevolence and personal holiness are inseparably linked together. Untie the loop and what have you got? Either a sort of benevolence which can go hand-in-hand with the most intense spirit of worldliness, or a rigid pharisaic separation without a single generous emotion. It is only the presence of that which is heavenly and divine that can secure true unity and consistency of character. Let it never be forgotten that true Christianity is simply Christ reproduced by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. Dry rules will never do. It must be Christ in all.

Leviticus 6: 14-18

THE PRIEST'S PLACE AND PORTION

These verses show us three things in connection with “the law of the meat offering” — the priest, his place and his portion.

1. *The priest.* All the sons of Aaron were priests. They became such by birth. They were born into this highly-privileged position. They did not reach it by effort, but simply by birth. Being sons of Aaron, they *were* priests. They might be disqualified for the discharge of the functions of their position through bodily blemish or ceremonial defilement (Lev. 21-22), but as to the position itself, it was a necessary result of their being sons of Aaron. Position is one thing; ability to discharge the functions or capacity to enjoy the privileges thereof, is quite another.

A dwarf among the sons of Aaron was deprived of many of the higher priestly dignities, but a dwarf was to “eat the bread of his God, of the most holy, and of the holy.” God would not leave the feeblest or most diminutive member of the priestly household without a holy portion. “Only he shall not go in unto the veil, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish, that he profane not My sanctuaries: for I the Lord do sanctify them.” A dwarf could not attend the altar of God, but the God of the altar took care of the dwarf. The two things are divinely perfect. God's claims have been perfectly answered and the need of His priestly family perfectly met.

2. *The place.* The place where the priest was to partake of his portion teaches us a most valuable lesson of practical holiness. “With unleavened bread shall it be eaten in the holy place, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation they shall eat it.” That is to say, it is only in the power of personal holiness and in the immediate presence of God that we can really partake of our priestly portion. The *way* in which we get the place exhibits absolute grace. The *place* which we get demands personal holiness. To speak of effort in reaching the place is the fallacy of legalism. To think of unholiness in the place is the blasphemy of lawlessness. I reach the position only through grace. I occupy the position only in holiness.

The pathway to the sanctuary has been thrown open by free grace, but it is to the sanctuary of God that grace has opened the pathway. These things must never be forgotten. We want to have them graven on the tablets of the conscience and hidden in the chambers of the heart.

3. *The portion.* And now as to the portion. “This is the law of the meat offering: the sons of Aaron shall offer it before the Lord, before the altar. And he shall take of it his handful, of the flour of the meat offering and of the oil thereof, and *all* the frankincense thereof, and shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savor, even the memorial of it unto the Lord. And the remainder thereof shall Aaron and his sons eat.” The fine flour and oil typify Christ's perfect manhood, conceived and anointed by the Holy Spirit. This is the portion of God's priests to be enjoyed in the sanctuary of the divine presence, in separation of heart unto God. It is utterly impossible that we can enjoy Christ anywhere else but in the presence of God or in any other way than personal holiness. To speak of enjoying Christ while living in worldliness, indulging in pride, gratifying our lusts, giving a loose reign to our temper and passions, is a fatal delusion. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth” (1 John 1: 6). The two things are wholly incompatible. “Fellowship with God” and “walking in darkness” are as diametrically opposed as heaven and hell.

Thus the place of all true priests — all believers, all members of the priestly household — is to be within the sacred precincts of the sanctuary in the immediate presence of God, feeding upon Christ in the power of personal holiness. All this we are taught in “the law of the meat offering.”

Let the reader note particularly that “all the frankincense” was consumed on the altar. Why was this? Because frankincense typified the fragrance of Christ's manhood as enjoyed exclusively by God Himself. There was that in Christ as a Man down here, which only God could duly appreciate. Every thought, every look, every word, every movement, every act of “the Man Christ Jesus” emitted a fragrance which went up directly to the throne of God and refreshed the heart of Him who sat thereon. Not a single atom of Christ's perfectness or preciousness was ever lost. It might be lost on a cold,

heartless world and even upon carnal and earthly-minded disciples, but it was not lost upon God. It all went up to Him according to its true value.

This is a spring of joy and comfort to the spiritual mind. When we think of how the blessed Lord Jesus was not appreciated in this world, how little even His own disciples understood or valued Him, how the rarest and most exquisite touches and traits of His perfect humanity were lost upon a rude and unbelieving world and even upon His own people, what a comfort to remember that He was perfectly understood and appreciated by the One who sat on the throne! There was an unbroken line of communication kept up between the heart of Jesus and the heart of God. The cloud of incense was continually ascending to the throne from the only perfect Man who ever trod this cursed and groaning earth.

Not a grain of the incense was lost because not a grain was entrusted even into the hands of the priests. All went up to God. Nothing was lost. The world might despise and hate, the disciples might fail to understand or appreciate; what then? Was a single ray of Christ's moral glory to go for nothing? Surely not; all was duly estimated by Him for whom it was designed and who alone could value it aright. This was true in every stage of Christ's precious life down here. And when we reach the end of that life and see the climax when one disciple sold Him for thirty pieces of silver, another cursed and swore he knew Him not, all forsook Him and fled, the world nailed Him to a cross between two thieves, God showed to the universe how much He differed from all the thoughts of men by placing the crucified One on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

Thus much as to the primary application of the incense which, unquestionably, is to Christ. We may also observe that it has a secondary application to the believer which he should seek to understand. True Christianity is the outflow of the life of Christ in the believer's practical ways and this is most precious to God, though it may be lost upon an unbelieving world and even upon a professing Church. There is not a movement of the life of Christ in the believer, not an expression of what He is, not the smallest manifestation of His grace that does not ascend directly as sweet

incense to the throne of God. It may not attract the notice or elicit the applause of this world. It may not get a place in the records of men, but it goes up to God. This is enough for the faithful heart. God values all that is of Christ, nothing more, nothing else. There may be much that looks like service — much show, much noise, much that men make a great ado about — but nothing goes up to the throne, nothing is entered into the imperishable records of eternity but that which is the fruit of the life of Christ in the soul.

May God the Holy Spirit lead us into the experimental understanding of these things and bring forth in us, day by day, a brighter and fuller manifestation of Christ to the glory of God the Father!

Leviticus 10:1-11.

False Worship.

In meditating upon the ordinances of the Mosaic ritual, one thing in particular strikes the mind, viz., the remarkably jealous way in which God fenced Himself round from the approach of man, as such. It is salutary for the soul to ponder this. We are in great danger of admitting into our minds an element of unholy familiarity when thinking of God, which the devil may use in a very pernicious way and to a very evil end.

It is a fundamental principle of truth, that in proportion as God is exalted and revered in our thoughts, will our walk through life be shaped in accordance with what He loves and enjoins; in other words, there is a strong moral link between our estimate of God and our moral conduct. If our thoughts of God are *low*, low will be our standard of Christian walk; if high, the result will be accordingly. Thus, when Israel, at the foot of mount Horeb, "changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass," the Lord's words were, "Thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have *corrupted themselves*." Mark those words, "corrupted themselves." They could not do otherwise, when they let down their thoughts of the dignity and majesty of God so low as to imagine, for a moment, that He was "like an ox that eateth grass."

Similar is the teaching of Romans 1. There the apostle shows us that the reason of all the abominations of the Gentile nations must be sought for in the fact, that "when they knew God, they glorified Him not *as God*;" thus they too "corrupted themselves." This is a principle possessing vast practical influence. If we attempt to lower God, we must necessarily lower ourselves; and herein we are furnished with a key by which to interpret all religion. There is an inseparable link between the character of the god of any religion and the character of the votaries thereof, and Jehovah was constantly reminding His people of the fact, that *their* conduct was to be the consequence of what *He* was. "I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt; therefore," etc., "be ye holy, for I

am holy." And exactly similar is the Spirit's word to us: "He that hath this hope in him purifieth *himself*, even as *He is pure*."

This principle, I conceive, carries us far above all merely systematic views of truth; it is not at all a question of mere doctrine. No; it brings us at once into the deep recesses of the soul, there to ponder, as beneath the piercing, jealous eye of the *Thrice Holy One*, the estimate which we, as individuals, are daily and hourly forming of *Him*. I feel that we cannot with impunity refuse to give our minds seriously to this important point of truth; it will be found to contain much of the secret of our low walk and lamentable deadness. God is not exalted in our thoughts; *He* has not the supreme place in our affections; self, the world, our family, our daily employments, have, as regards the most of us, thrust down our gracious God from the throne of our affections, and robbed the One who died to save us of the blood-purchased homage of our hearts. This being the case, can we expect to flourish? Ah! no; the husbandman who gives his time and thoughts to something else during the spring time, shall look in vain for a golden harvest; he shall "reap the whirlwind," as many are now doing.

The opening verses of this chapter furnish a truly terrifying illustration of the inflexible justice and burning jealousy of God; they sound in our ears as with a voice of thunder: "I am a jealous God." Nadab and Abihu, as it were but yesterday, stood before the Lord, — clothed in their garments of glory and beauty, washed in the blood, brought near unto God, made His priests, had passed through all the solemn ceremonies of inauguration into their priestly office. Yes, all this occurred but as yesterday, and today they are wasted by the fire of Jehovah, and are seen to fall from their high elevation — a spectacle to men and angels of the fact, that the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility, and the greater, too, the judgment if that responsibility be not fully met.

What, we may ask, was their sin? Was it murder? Did they stain the curtains of the tabernacle with human blood? Or was it some other abominable sin, from which the moral sense shrinks? No; it was a sin with which the blessed God is grieved by multitudes of professors at this moment — it *was false worship!* "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer and put fire

therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not." "*Strange fire.*" Here was their sin. Here we see men apparently engaged in making preparation for the worship of God; there is the fire, the incense, the censer, and the priest; and, mark, they were not false and spurious priests, but true sons of Aaron, members of the really separated priestly house, clothed in the divinely appointed priestly robes; yet, notwithstanding, *struck dead*, and by whom? by Him whom we call our God and Father! How awfully solemn! Yes, and the fact receives increased solemnity in our view, when we remember that the fire which consumed these false worshippers came from off the "mercy-seat." It was not from Mount Sinai's top this fire came, but out "from before the Lord," who was dwelling "between the cherubim above the mercy-seat." God will not be trifled with. Even from the throne of grace will the fire come forth, to lay prostrate those who come before it in any other way than the divinely appointed way. "They died before the Lord!" Dreadful announcement! "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15: 4).

Let us inquire, then, what the "strange fire" was which brought down such terrific judgment upon those priests; and, in order the more clearly to ascertain this, it is only needful that we turn our attention for a moment to *true* worship and the elements which composed it, in the sixteenth chapter of this book. We find the elements of true worship laid before us in the following words: "And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not" (Lev. 16: 13). Here we see that the elements composing true worship were two, viz., *pure fire* and *pure incense*. It must be *living fire* fresh from the altar of God, where it was perpetually fed by the sacrifice of God's own appointment. The doctrine of this is very apparent. On God's altar is seen, day and night, a fire blazing, expressing, in the view of faith, the inflexible holiness of the Divine nature feeding upon the sacrifice of Christ.

Again, the incense must be *pure*, for "ye shall offer no *strange* incense" (Ex. 30: 7); *i.e.*, it must be such as that God can delight therein, and of His own appointment, not that which is according to our own thoughts, for it was only *pure* incense that could offer a proper material for food to the pure living fire from off the altar. Thus, our worship, to be pure, must possess these two qualities: *Christ* must constitute the material of it, and *the Spirit* alone must kindle the flame. This is true worship. When our souls are really happy in the contemplation of Christ and His precious atonement, led into that contemplation by the Holy Ghost, *then alone* we are able to worship "in spirit and in truth." "While I was musing, the fire kindled." While our souls muse on Jesus, our censer sends up its cloud of acceptable incense over the mercy-seat. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Now, false worship is the very reverse of all this. What is it? It is composed of a variety of elements, fleshly thoughts, animal feelings, worked upon by external things, an imposing ceremonial, sensuous rituals, dim religious light, fine music, pomp and circumstance. These are the elements of false worship, and are opposed to the simple worship of the inner sanctuary, "the live coal, and the pure incense." And in looking at Christendom at this moment, do we not see numerous altars smoking with this impure fire and impure incense? Do we not see the most unholy materials consumed upon many a censer, and the smoke thereof going up as an insult rather than a sweet savour to God? Truly we do, and it is needful for us to look well to the condition of our hearts, lest we be carried away into the self-same evil, for we may rest assured that no one who thus trifles with God will escape with impunity

Let us now note the effect of this upon Aaron. "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. *And Aaron held his peace.*" "I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because *Thou* didst it." Aaron saw the hand of the Lord in the solemn scene before him, and *was still*; not a murmur escapes him; "*it is the Lord,*" and "He will be sanctified in them that approach Him." "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that

are round about Him." There is something unspeakably grand and awful in this scene; Aaron in solemn silence before the Lord; his two living sons on one side, and his two dead ones on the other. What an example of the inflexible justice of God! The bodies of these two men were, it appears, burned by fire, but their priestly robes were untouched, for their cousins were told by Moses to go near and carry them forth; and "they carried them *in their coats* out of the camp." Here we learn a solemn lesson: we may, by disobedience, reduce ourselves to such a condition that there will remain nothing but the mere outward form, as seen in the "coats" of Aaron's sons. If any one had looked beneath these coats, he would only have seen the blasted bodies of two priests! The substance, the reality was gone; nought remained but the external covering: such is "a form of godliness without the power," "a name to live while dead."

Lord, keep us very solemn and watchful, for we know but little of our fearful capabilities of evil until we are brought into circumstances to develop them! We may retain the outward appearance of priests, the phraseology of worship, acquaintance with the furniture of God's house, and, after all, be void of godly reality and power in our souls. Oh! reader, let our worship be *pure*, let our hearts be simple as to their object, let us have the *pure* incense and fire, and ever remember that "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints." I would here observe, that in looking at Aaron and his two sons standing over the dead bodies, we are forcibly reminded of the last chapter of Isaiah, a truly solemn chapter: "They shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

But we are now called to contemplate the finest principle of truth in the entire passage. "And Moses said unto Aaron and his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes, lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people; but let your brethren and the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle, lest ye die; for *the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you*. And they did

according to the word of Moses." When one enters upon the office of the priesthood, he is brought out of the region of nature's influence, and must no longer yield to its claims. This is exemplified by Aaron. Natural ties had been burst asunder violently. A melancholy blank had been made in his affections, yet he must not be influenced in the least by all that had taken place before him; and why? "The anointing oil of the Lord was upon him." Surely this is a practical lesson for us. Why has nature such a power over us? Why have earthly circumstances and connections such influence upon us? Why are we so much affected by the things that are passing around us, the vicissitudes of this earthly scene? Why are we so inordinately acted upon by the mere claims and ties of nature? Because we are not *abiding* as we should *in the tabernacle*, with "the anointing oil of the Lord upon us." Here is the real cause of all the failure. In our not realising our priestly place, our priestly dignity, our priestly privileges. Hence it is that we are so carried away by present things, and dragged down from our high elevation as "Kings and priests unto God."

May we then be quickened by this passage, this solemn passage of the Word, to seek more and more of the holy elevation of mind expressed in the words, "Uncover not your heads!" May we get more deeply into the mind of God about present things, and our own place therein! God grant it, for the sake of His dear Son!

Leviticus 24 and Ephesians 4:4.

Unity: What is it? And am I confessing it?

A lecture by C. H. Mackintosh.

I suppose, beloved brethren, there is not one of us, whatever may have been our experience, whether our course has been long or short, who is not impressed with the unspeakable importance of having the truth of God distinctly before us, and not only before our minds, but in our hearts, as a divine reality — something influential and formative — a living link between our souls and the living God, not merely as to the question of individual salvation, infinitely precious as that is, but as to the path we are called to tread, and the position that we occupy as Christians.

As you get along, beloved brethren, you must be discovering that nothing stands, but having the truth of God in your own hearts, and holding it directly from Him, no matter who may be the instrument in communicating it to you. You must be able to give a reason, not only for the hope that is in you, but for the path which you tread, the niche which you fill — you must be able to give a divine reason for all, or else you will not be able to stand. Never was the truth of this more apparent than at the present moment, because, as we all know, people are being tested; there is a testing and a sifting going on in the professing church, and in our own very midst, brethren, which most of you may feel. No doubt some of us may be called to feel it more than others, but the most cursory observer cannot fail to see this, that the sieve is doing its work in the professing church, and doing its work amongst ourselves, and that it is being made manifest, in the most striking manner, who has been really taught of God, and who has been merely hanging on to something of his own, or blindly following in the wake of his fellow. It has been made manifest, brethren, whether our faith is set in the wisdom of men or in the power of God. Secondhand faith is being proved and found lacking. It cannot stand in the day of trial. We must have to do, each for himself, with the living God.

Now in the whole of what I have to say, there is one thing which I believe the Spirit of God has laid upon my heart to impress upon you, beloved — and you know I always speak in the utmost confidence and freedom, and I feel assured you will receive it in the same manner. I feel then, brethren, that the Spirit of God would have me impress first of all upon you the importance of having your faith standing *only in the power of God*; that no matter what may be the measure of it — it may be very small or it may be very large — it does not matter what the measure is, the point is that your fixed stay must be in the wisdom and the power of God, so that if you had not a second person to support you, if you had not the sympathy of another individual, you at least possess the blessed consciousness that God has communicated to your soul truth which you hold from Him, and which is the spring of all your authority, the ground of your confidence, and the true secret of your power.

A saint once said, when passing through a time of deepest exercise, he was brought to ask himself this question, and to ask it in all solemnity, in all godly simplicity, "If the whole world and church were gone, is the word of God sufficient as a thread to take me across the abyss?" That is the question, my brethren, and that question I will suggest at the outset to every one of you, from the oldest to the youngest. I see before me saints of God who were such long before the one who is speaking to them, and I see before me saints of God of perhaps a few days' or a few weeks' standing, but the principle I am now urging upon you is a principle of cardinal importance; it is a principle of unspeakable value; it is what I would urge upon you; and if I do nothing else than to urge and re-urge and rivet home this principle on your souls, I shall feel that I have not spoken in vain. The question is this — Can you say when you are all alone, "The word of God is quite sufficient for me, if both world and church were gone; is it quite sufficient as a thread to take me across the abyss?"

Now, that is the point. Can you say that, beloved? I pause and put this question to you, as in the very presence of our one Lord and Master, Have you such a sense of the value and authority of the word of God; have you got such a sense of the reality of this truth, this revelation which God has given you, that, though you had not a

second person to support you, you could say, "That is quite enough for me?"

Of course you will tell me, beloved, that it is only the Spirit that can enable you to appreciate and grasp and hold that word. Quite so; but I am speaking now of the value of the word of God; and never, I am persuaded, was there a moment in the history of the church of God on earth, when it was so distinctly necessary that your souls, my beloved brethren, should be rooted and grounded, stablished and braced up in the knowledge of this fact, that you have in the word of God all that you can possibly want — the word of God as brought home by the Spirit to your hearts.

Now some of you may be disposed to ask, "What have these introductory remarks to do with the scripture that has been read?" Or perhaps you may ask, "What is your subject? What is your message?" Well, beloved brethren, I tell you at once, my thesis is this — The unity of the church of God as stated in Ephesians 4: 4. And then again, if any feel disposed to ask, "What has the 24th of Leviticus to do with the unity of the church of God?" I reply, It has to do with it in this way. I read Leviticus 24 with the purpose of illustrating to you, brethren, from the history of Israel, and the unity of the nation of Israel, the deeper truth of the unity of the one body, and it is my object now to set before you the fact of the unity of God's Israel, His earthly people, as an illustration, as a type, if you please, of the higher unity of the church of God.

Now in this passage of the 24th of Leviticus, what have you got? You have one of the most expressive and beautiful figures that can possibly engage the spiritual mind; you have in those twelve loaves ranged upon the golden table before the Lord, the distinct figure of the indissoluble unity and yet the perfect distinctness of Israel's twelve tribes. Now there is a grand truth — the perfect distinctness and yet the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes, and you may have noticed — I do not think you could have avoided noticing — the frequent occurrence in this chapter of the words "continual, perpetual, everlasting." Again and again these words occur in reading this passage. What do they mean, beloved brethren? They mean this, that the unity of God's people Israel was not a thing of today or tomorrow; it was a grand verity, an eternal truth of God

foreshadowed in those twelve loaves on the golden table, before the Lord.

Oh what a type, brethren, what a presentation! And, further, as to the intention of this passage, you may perhaps feel disposed to ask another question, "What has that paragraph about the stoning of the blasphemer to do with all this?" I believe it has a great deal to do with it, beloved brethren. I believe that the grouping of this passage by the Holy Ghost is striking, forcible and instructive. In the stoning of the blasphemer you have that which might be the fate of the nation under the governmental dealings of God; but, at the same time, in those twelve loaves on the golden table, you have the eternal truth as to the nation's condition in God's view — that looked at from God's stand point the nation was ONE whatever might be its condition, as viewed from man's stand point. I repeat it, beloved — looked at from God's stand point, looked at in the light of those seven golden lamps which in other words was the expression of the light and testimony of the Holy Ghost, based upon and connected with the perfect work of Christ, Israel is ONE, the nation is one; there are twelve tribes maintained in the unity although, as I have said, in the governmental dealings of God, and looked at from man's stand point, the nation may be suffering the penalty of their sin. In a word, however the nation of Israel may be scattered, and broken, and crushed, in man's view, it is in God's view — in God's eternal counsels — and in the view of faith one and indivisible. To deny this is to call in question the integrity of the truth of God. If we can play fast and loose with scripture as to one point, we may do so as to all.

And now I will give a few illustrations of the way in which faith laid hold of and acted upon this grand truth.

Turn with me for an instance to 1 Kings 18. I shall not ask you to read the passage, but have your Bibles open there. It is familiar, I am sure, to all. The scene is upon the top of Carmel. It is a scene in the history of Elijah the Tishbite, perfectly familiar to all, but I want you to look at it for one special object. I want you to look at it as an illustration of the power of faith in that great truth of the unity of Israel's twelve tribes.

I feel sure that you have often read of Elijah's building his altar of twelve stones. Every Sunday school child has read it; but I confess to you, beloved brethren, that, often as one has read the passage, it has lately shone before the vision of my so I with a brighter lustre than I have ever seen before. I ask myself this question, Why did Elijah build an altar of twelve stones? What was his authority for that? What was it, shall I say, that nerved his arm to the act? He was standing in the presence of eight hundred false prophets, he was standing in the presence of all the power of Jezebel, and in the presence of ruin and apostacy. The ten tribes were separated from the two. There was a rent made in the nation, looked at from man's stand point, but Elijah stands upon Mount Carmel, and he looks at that nation in the vision of GOD, and with the eye of *faith*. He does not reason; he does not say, "It is no use now my taking this lofty stand, it is no use my attempting to build an altar with twelve stones now. The day is gone by for that. I must lower the standard according to the practical condition of things around me. It was well and perfectly consistent for a Joshua or a Solomon to build such an altar, but it would only be a piece of folly on my part. It is the height of presumption to be talking about an altar of twelve stones when the ten tribes and the two are divided, and when the whole scene is plunged in ruin."

No, my brethren, Elijah did not reason thus; he took his stand on the imperishable ground of faith. Elijah placed his foot where I want every child of God to place his foot — that is, on the indestructible revelation of God. I want you to read this act in the light which emanates from the seven golden candlesticks, and in the light which emanates from that golden table in the sanctuary of God. I want you, my beloved brethren, to see that the words "continual, perpetual, everlasting" are stamped upon the whole of the history of God's truth and His thoughts respecting Israel. Elijah knew nothing of the principle so rife in this our day, "It is no use talking about the unity of the church of God." You see a sneer of contempt and unbelief upon the lips of people when you talk about the unity of the body of Christ. Persons will shrug their shoulders and say, "Do not talk to me about the unity of the body. It is a thing of the past. It is a bygone thing. Don't talk to me about the unity of the church. Where is it to be seen? Where is it developed? Where is it illustrated?"

Beloved brethren, bring yourselves back in thought for a moment, and stand beside that man of faith on the top of Carmel, and ask yourselves, Where are the twelve tribes? It might, with equal force, have been said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Do not talk to me about the unity of the nation. It is a thing of the past. It no longer exists. It is the height of presumption to think of building an altar of twelve stones in the face of a divided people — a broken unity." But what weight would such suggestions have had with our prophet? None whatever. He looked at the nation from a divine standpoint, and therefore he erected his altar of twelve stones "according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name."

Now, the question is, How long was Israel to tee the name, and how long was Israel's unity to subsist? Continually, perpetually, everlastingly. Here Elijah took his stand.

And mark further, beloved, what I think is of unspeakable importance. It was not a mere speculation of Elijah's mind. It was not an inoperative dogma, an uninfluential opinion which he held. Elijah might have held the truth of Israel's unity as a cold theory, in the region of his intellect) he might very comfortably have gone on, and said in his heart, "I believe in the unity of the nation of Israel, but I am not going to confess it. There is no manifestation of it, and, therefore, I am not going to bring it forward; I am not going to take, as it were, my stand upon it. I am not going to carry it out." But this would never do. Elijah justly felt that if the unity of the twelve tribes was a grand truth, then it must, at all cost, be carried out, and hence he did carry it out. How? By building an altar of twelve stones, "according to the number of the tribes of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." Faith could never give that up. It was a great practical truth — to be owned and acted upon, in the face of ten thousand difficulties, and ten thousand foes. Elijah could not lower the standard the breadth of a hair. He could not surrender the truth of God to be trampled under foot by the priests and prophets of Baal. He felt that the sacrifice which he was about to offer to the God of Israel could only be presented on an altar of twelve stones. *This was faith.*

And here I pause, that your souls may dwell upon this, because it really demands our deepest attention. It is not a mere matter of opinion to be taken up or laid down at our pleasure. People speak of holding the doctrine of the mystical unity of the body of Christ; but there is no truth that is not designed to be practical, no truth that is not designed to have an influence on the heart and life. This is very manifest in Elijah's case. The unity of the twelve tribes was to him a grand reality; it was something which he felt bound to confess in the presence of Baal's eight hundred prophets, and in the presence of Jezebel and her persecutions. He did not hide the truth under a bushel, or under a bed; but confessed it openly and boldly before men and devils. He built an altar of twelve stones, and, by so doing, he expressed his lively faith in that grand truth, namely, the eternal unity of the nation of Israel.

And mark, if he had not done that, he would have been lowering the standard of God's truth to be trampled in the dust by the prophets of Baal. This he could not do. God's truth was a sacred thing. And not only so, but it was and is formative and influential. So the prophet felt, and so he acted. And we are safe in asserting that if he had not built the altar of twelve stones, the fire of God would not have fallen upon the sacrifice. That fire was the expression of the divine approval. It was like the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle of old, and the temple afterward, when all had been done according to the divine command. Beloved brethren, what a sublime spectacle for the heart to gaze upon! It is perfectly magnificent to see Elijah the prophet unfurling the standard in the presence of those eight hundred false prophets, and to read on that standard, in imperishable characters, the truth of the unity of the nation of Israel.

There is a moral grandeur about it that captivates the heart. And more than that — for that would be a small thing — there is moral power in it to *sustain* your hearts and mine in the confession of that higher truth of the unity of the body of Christ, in the very face of the sneer of unbelief, in the face of all the contempt and ridicule which we may have to encounter in seeking to carry out that precious truth, "There is one body and one Spirit." But here allow me to ask you, brethren, Do you think that Elijah had no heart to feel that the ten tribes and the two were divided? Do you suppose for a

moment that with all the sublimity of that spectacle presented to us on Mount Carmel, he had no tears to shed over the ruin and desolation around him? Ah! no. Take another look at the prophet, and see him — where? See him prostrate before God, his head down between his knees, down in the very dust. Waiting — waiting upon God for what? Till a cloud should appear, a harbinger of blessing flowing forth from the exhaustless treasure-house of God, who, in spite of all the unfaithfulness of his people, is always ready to answer faith where it exists. Faith owns the ruin, bows low under the sense of it, yet rises above it and counts on God, who never fails a trusting heart.

I shall now ask you to turn with me to the 29th chapter of the second book of Chronicles. Take one clause in the 24th verse of that chapter, which contains the same principle. "For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for" — whom? For Judah and Benjamin? No. (2 Chr. 29: 24) For "*all Israel*." Here we have the same principle. Here you have Hezekiah taking his stand upon the same lofty ground that Elijah had occupied in his day. The ten tribes were divided from the two. Jotham and Ahaz had been doing their work, and things had gone from bad to worse. But here is Hezekiah doing the same thing as Elijah, and acting in the same faith. It is not a question of the measure of intelligence — that is not the point; but, beloved brethren, it is one of the most precious features of the subject that is before us to-night that it is a question of simple faith in the truth of Israel's perfect unity before the eye of God. It is simple faith gazing on those precious words which shine like gems in Lev. 24: "*A perpetual statute*," "*An everlasting covenant*." It is not a question here of Israel's conduct towards God. That assuredly has its place and its importance. But we are not speaking now of man's deserts, but of God's dealings — not of Israel's failure, but of Jehovah's faithfulness. It is our holy privilege to stand in the sanctuary of God, and gaze with the eye of faith on those twelve loaves on the pure table beneath the seven lamps of the golden candlestick — type of the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

And what does that testimony set forth? This, most distinctly, that all through the dark and gloomy watches of the nation's night the

twelve tribes are before the eye of God in their perfect unity, undisturbed by all the heavings, and tossings, and surgings of the nations. The blasphemer may have to be stoned outside the camp; the governmental dealings of God may be displayed in all their stern reality; but faith sees the twelve loaves on the golden table. Faith has to do with eternal realities. It endures as seeing Him who is invisible. It looks at things within the veil. It makes God its significant figure, and is in nowise moved by outward appearances. In a word, faith knows God, and can trust Him for everything. Faith is the knowledge of God, it is confidence in God — this is faith. Ah, what a reality, beloved brethren! I earnestly beseech you, as in the presence of God — I beseech every one of you to get hold of what this is, this simple faith in God, that will carry your soul through all sorts of circumstances, the same faith that sustained Elijah on the top of Carmel, the same faith that enabled Hezekiah to command that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for "all Israel" — that is to say, the sacrifice which was to be the foundation of all the nation's hopes, the sacrifice which was in its aspect to embrace the whole Israel of God.

And now, in reference to the actings of the good king Hezekiah, let us see how his faith was regarded; let us mark how he was treated when he sought, according to his measure, to carry out practically the truth of God. For be it well remembered, Hezekiah did not rest satisfied with offering the sacrifice for "all Israel." He not merely established the ground on which God's people might gather, but he sought to gather them thereon. And observe how he did this. "So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto *the Lord God of Israel* at Jerusalem: *for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.*

So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout *all Israel* and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, *Ye children of Israel*, turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to

desolation, as ye see. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and *enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever*: and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again to the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him." (2 Chr. 30: 5-9.)

This, if rightly viewed, was a most touching and powerful appeal. Hezekiah takes the highest ground, and would have others to do the same. He was himself consciously on God's ground, and he would have others to occupy it with him. His eye rested on the God of Abraham — on the land of Israel — on Jerusalem — and on the whole nation of God's people. It might, and doubtless did, in the judgment of many, savour of presumption in Hezekiah to put forth such very lofty language, to speak as if he and those with him were alone right, and all their brethren wrong. But that would entirely depend upon the spirit in which the letter was received and read. To pride and self-sufficiency such an appeal would be absolutely intolerable; but where there was true contrition and humility it would be received with a hearty approval. Thus, in fact, it proved, as we read in the scripture before us. "So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but *they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them*. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun *humbled themselves*, and came to Jerusalem."

This, brethren, is just as it will ever be. Faith and its actings will be laughed at by those who are on false ground, those who are walking in the sparks of their own kindling. But the broken and contrite heart gets the blessing which ever flows from taking God at His word, and acting on His eternal truth. Those who humbly bowed to Hezekiah's appeal gathered themselves together on God's ground, and owned God's centre. They did not say, "It is vain to take such lofty ground in the face of the nation's actual condition. It is the height of folly and presumption for Hezekiah to attempt to carry out such principles amid the hopeless ruin of the dispensation." No; they

"humbled themselves," and came up to Jerusalem. In true humility of mind they gathered themselves together to carry out God's object — namely, to keep the passover.

And what was the result? Were they disappointed? Did the issue prove them to be mere visionary enthusiasts who were acting on some silly chimera of Hezekiah, or some wild imagination of their own minds? Ah! no; they were permitted to taste as rich blessing as ever was known in the nation's brightest and palmiest days. "The children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven." (2 Chr. 30: 21-27.)

Here, then, was the answer of God to the faith of Hezekiah, for He never disappoints a heart that counts on Him. These fourteen joyous days, spent by the congregation around the paschal feast, furnished the most ample proof of the reality of counting on the living God, spite of all the failure and ruin which ever mark the history of man and his ways. "Since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem." God can fill the hearts of His people with joy and thanksgiving and praise, though all around be characterised by confusion and desolation.

And, be it remembered — yea, let it never be forgotten — that all this joy and blessing may well comport with the deepest sense of the failure and unfaithfulness of man. Indeed they will ever be found in company. Thus, in Hezekiah's case, we see him most fully

recognising the true practical condition of the nation. This is seen in the fact of their keeping the passover in the second month instead of the first. "Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the Lord." Here we observe the congregation availing themselves of grace as set forth in Numbers 9: 10-12. This was in lovely moral order. Faith always recognises the true condition of things, but counts on the ample provisions of divine grace. Hezekiah felt that the people were not up to the divine standard, but he knew that the grace of God could meet them where they were, provided only they took their true place; hence he prayed for them, saying, "The good Lord pardon *every one that prepareth his heart* to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."

Thus it was in Hezekiah's day, and thus it is now. There was the confession of human failure, and yet the grasping of divine faithfulness. If Israel was not in a condition to keep the passover in the first month, God could bless them in the second month. Though Israel's condition was not up to the standard of God, yet the grace of God could come down to the condition of Israel. The second month most surely was not the first, but if only there was true preparation of heart, God could bless in the one as well as in the other. There is no use in assuming to be what we are not. We must take our true place, and God can meet us there, according to what He is in Himself. Thus it is that faith mounts up to God, and lays hold of those things that are according to His infallible faithfulness.

Hence, then — to apply our illustration — I read in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians that "there is one body," and I find that truth lying side by side with all the great cardinal truths of the Christian religion, insomuch that if you touch one you must touch all, if you shake one you must shake all. I do not see, beloved brethren, how a person can really and solemnly hold any one truth of God, if he allows another truth to be frittered away, because it is not practically exhibited. Suppose you ask me, "Do you believe in the doctrines of justification by faith, original sin, and man's hopeless ruin?" Surely. "Do you

believe that 'there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all?'" "Why do you believe these things? Because you *feel* them, or see them?" No. "Why do you believe them?" I believe them because God's word reveals them. This is the only ground of faith in any truth of the Christian religion, and therefore were I to reject the grand doctrine of the unity of the body of Christ because of the innumerable divisions of Christendom, I should be judging by the sight of my eyes, instead of building upon the truth of God. I should be reasoning upon what I see, instead of believing what God tells me.

If, therefore, I be asked why I believe in the doctrine of justification by faith, I reply, Because it is set forth in the imperishable volume of God. On the very same ground I believe in the unity of the body, the deity of Christ, the perfect humanity of Christ, and the sacrificial virtue of His blood. I believe in the efficacy of His priesthood. I believe in the fact of His coming glory. I believe all these verities because they are written in the holy scriptures. Very well, on the selfsame ground, there is one body and one Spirit. Do you suppose that I should believe this more firmly if all the true saints of God in London were to break bread in one building every Lord's day? Indeed I should not. I believe it, but it is not because I see it practically carried out, but because it is declared in the fourth of Ephesians, that "there is one body."

Let us turn now, for a few moments, to the profoundly interesting and instructive history of Josiah, as recorded in 2 Chr. 34 and 35. We shall find a striking illustration of the same weighty principle. Josiah, like Hezekiah and Elijah, recognised the unity of the twelve tribes, and acted upon the truth thereof in the face of the most depressing and humiliating condition of things. He acted according to the immutable truth of God, and not according to the practical state of God's people. He carried his reformatory operations into all the cities *that pertained to Israel*. And in speaking to the Levites, he charged them, at the opening of that marvellous day, to serve the Lord and His people *Israel*. Get hold of that point. He charges the Levites that they were to serve Jehovah, and not His people *Judah*; but 'His people *Israel*.' He can only speak of and act toward the nation according to the revealed mind of God, and not according to their practical condition. It is the altar of twelve stones over again. It is the "burnt-offering and the sin-

offering for *all Israel*." It is the twelve loaves on the golden table, beneath the light of the seven golden candlesticks. It is the Israel of God in the vision of faith.

And yet Josiah stood at the very lowest point; the nation was on the eve of dissolution; Nebuchadnezzar was almost at the gates — no matter. The whole thing was about to crumble into decay — no matter; faith was not going to crumble; Josiah in spirit, Josiah in principle, got back to the golden table — the only place for faith to get. Oh! brethren, do you see it? I ask you, Do you drink into your souls the precious truth, that however one may fail to put this before you in intelligible language, I am as convinced of this as that those lamps are burning before me, that we are occupied now with a principle which, if you grasp it, will brace up your souls and give decision and vigour to your entire practical career, no matter what is against you?

Do not suppose I am conducting you through these historic scenes of Old Testament scriptures merely to occupy an hour: no, brethren, I am delivering to you the verities that God has laid upon my heart to speak to you. For what is the grand object of this assembly? What are you here for? Is it to pass an hour? No; you must remember that the object of an assembly like this is to bring souls into personal, living contact with the truth of God. That is the object of such meetings; and it is the bounden duty of every man who stands in a position like this to speak in the ears of his brethren. I say it is his bounden duty, and should be his one absorbing object, to bring the soul and God into living personal contact. That is power. I may preach a sermon, I may deliver a course of lectures, and never bring the soul face to face with God, or bring the conscience under the light and authority of holy scripture.

Now this latter was what Josiah did. Having felt in his own soul the mighty action of the word of God, he sought to bring the souls of his brethren under the same mighty influence. (See 2 Chr. 34: 29, 30.) And what was the result? That from the days of King Solomon, those brilliant and palmy days, there had never been such a passover as that which was kept by Josiah at the very close of the nation's history. What is the meaning of that? It is another link in the chain; it is another pearl in the string; it is another gem in the tiara. It

is God's answer to the faith of His servant. Josiah took his stand upon faith in God, and God answered the faith. There had not been such a passover kept during all the days of the kings. Just think of that! There had been all the glories of Solomon's reign, and all the victories of David's reign, but there is the testimony of the Holy Ghost that there never had been such a passover as was kept in Josiah's reign. And you see that, because the very fact of the circumstances in which he was, threw a halo round his faith, God was more glorified by Josiah taking that stand, than He was by all the gold and silver that flowed into the treasury of Solomon.

But I must ask you to turn to another instance. Those cases which we have already adduced are drawn, as you will observe, from the period *before* the captivity. I want you now to come to an instance *during* the captivity. I ask you to turn to the sixth chapter of Daniel, and there you have another charming section in the history of faith. This chapter opens before you the same great principle. Here we see an exile, a captive of the children of Judah, under the most depressing and humiliating circumstances. The glory and the power had departed from Israel. God's judicial actings, God's governmental dealings, had taken effect upon them. They were all broken up, and carried captive; the city in ruins; all gone!

But, brethren, God's word was not in ruins; God's truth was not in ruins; God's faithfulness was not in ruins. And because God's truth and God's faithfulness were not in ruins, so neither was the faith of God's people in ruins. This latter shines out with peculiar lustre in the actings of that illustrious exile Daniel. Indeed, judging from his history, it would seem that the deeper the gloom that enwrapped the nation as a whole, the more brilliant were the flashes of individual faith.

Thus it was during the Babylonish captivity. Though the captives had to hang their harps on the willows; though the glory had departed from Israel; though the vessels of the Lord's house were in the temple of a false god; though all was as dismal and oppressive as it well could be; yet Daniel's faith rose majestically above the surrounding gloom, and laid hold upon the eternal and immutable truth of God; and not only laid hold of it, but carried it out practically. He opened his window, and prayed towards Jerusalem. Why did he

do this? Why pray towards Jerusalem? Was this some notion of his own, or was it the fruit of some grand divine principle? It was the latter unquestionably, as you may see at a glance in 2 Chronicles 6: 36-38. This scripture anticipates the very position in which Daniel found himself, and prescribes his course of action. *"If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name."*

This was the basis of Daniel's acting at Babylon in the days of Darius; this was his authority.

Faith always seeks and finds a warrant for its activities in the word of God. This is of the very deepest possible moment. If Daniel had not a divine warrant for praying toward Jerusalem, his conduct would have been preposterous in the extreme. It would have been the height of folly to rush into the lions' den merely to carry out some theory of his own. But, on the other hand, if there was a divine principle involved, then his conduct was what we may call perfectly sublime. It was, in point of fact, "the burnt-offering and sin-offering for Israel;" it was the altar of twelve stones over again; it was the twelve loaves on the pure table; it was owning God's centre, and taking God's ground, spite of the hopeless ruin of the dispensation, and the deep moral gloom that hung over the nation's horizon. Faith acts on the truth of God, let outward circumstances be what they may; and God always honours faith, and permits it to reap a golden harvest amid the most dreary and humiliating circumstances.

Thus then we see that Daniel simply followed in the wake of the Josiahs, the Hezekiahs, and the Elijahs of other days. He occupied the same platform with those men of God who, in the face of appalling difficulties had held up with a firm hand the standard of eternal truth. He takes his place amid that "great cloud of witnesses" of which the Holy Ghost speaks in Hebrews 11, witnesses to the power and value of faith in the living God. He opened his window, and prayed toward Jerusalem, though Jerusalem was in ruins; he prayed toward the temple, though the temple was in ashes. He looks not at the things that were seen, but at the things that were not seen.

He owned God's centre — the gathering-point of Israel's twelve tribes, although that centre lay not within the range of human vision, and the twelve tribes were scattered to the ends of the earth. He did not lower God's standard to suit the condition of Israel, but held it up with the vigorous hand of faith.

And what was the result? A splendid triumph! True he had to go down into the lions' den; but he came up again. He went down as a witness, and came up as a conqueror. All God's worthies get up by going down. This is the law of the kingdom. Daniel went down into the den; but we doubt if he ever spent a happier night upon earth than the night he spent in the den. He was there for God, and God was there with him.

Thus much as to the night. But what of the morning? Further victory! Earth's proudest monarch is subdued before the captive exile. Daniel was allowed to realize in his own person the truth of that early promise to Israel — "Thou shalt be the head, and not the tail." It is ever thus. The individual who acts on the truth of God, regardless of outward circumstances, is allowed to taste as high communion as ever was or ever could be known in the very brightest moments of the dispensation.

This is an immensely important principle, and one which we would earnestly press upon all Christians. We are apt at times, when under the withering influences of unbelief, to suppose that it is impossible to enjoy the high privileges which attach to our calling as Christians, seeing that the church has failed, and is in ruins. This is the miserable mistake of a dark and depressing unbelief. Faith, on the other hand, counts on God. It fixes its gaze upon His imperishable and unchangeable revelation. It rests on the infallible faithfulness of God, and thus enjoys communion with the very highest truth that characterizes the dispensation under which it lives.

Daniel proved this in his day, and so shall all who will only act on the same grand principle.

No doubt it might be said to him, as it is not infrequently said in our own day: "It is the height of folly and presumption; you are a visionary enthusiast to be praying towards a place that is a scene of

desolation; you ought rather to hush the very name in oblivion; you ought to draw the curtain of silence over the very name of Jerusalem; it is the very scene of your ruin and humiliation." But, ah! beloved, Daniel was in the deep and precious secret of God. He occupied the divine standpoint, and saw all from thence; and hence the correctness of his entire range of vision — hence the steadiness of his course — hence the splendour of his victory.

And here again, let me remind you of what I remarked before, that this truth was not a speculation; it was not a thing which you might keep very comfortably and quietly in some secret recess of your mind, while you occupied your house, and sat very comfortably in your arm-chairs by your firesides, and professed that Israel was one. No; Daniel acted thus in the very face of the lions' den. The lions' den was yawning to receive him, but Daniel never minded it; Daniel had nothing to do with the lions' den — no more than he had to do with the ruins of Jerusalem: he had to do with *God's truth*; he got back to the twelve loaves, to the golden table with the candlestick in the sanctuary of God — he got back to those twelve loaves, and there he saw by the eye of faith the stream of living light pouring down from heaven on the unbroken union of God's beloved Israel.

Ah! you see, it is not a speculation; it is a truth that must be confessed, come what may, and he did confess it. Yes; he "prayed toward Jerusalem." A man who did not understand what he was doing would say, "I cannot for the life of me understand that. I am sure you might pray as earnestly, as trustfully, with your curtains down and your windows shut. You might retire to your inmost closet. Why do you pray there? Do you think it was acting from some notion of his own brain? No, beloved, I want you to see this, and I cannot let you go without establishing this truth in your souls, that it was acting simply and entirely on the truth of God when he opened his window and prayed toward Jerusalem. Daniel could say, "There, you may throw me into the den tonight, but I will never give up the truth of God. I must stand for that, cost what it may. I have nothing to do with results — nothing to do with consequences. These I leave entirely with God. My place is simply to obey."

And this is of the utmost possible value. We hear a great deal now-a-days about the absence of power in the church. We are told that

there is no power for this, and no power for that. Our simple reply to all this sort of reasoning is that *it is not at all a question of power, but of obedience*. Was there much power in Daniel's day? There was. There was the power of faith, and the power of obedience. This is the sort of power which we want. It is not external power — or showy gifts — or astounding miracles, but that quiet, humble, steady spirit of obedience that leads the man of God along the narrow path of God's commandments. This is what we want. It is in this that our God delights, and to this He grants the sweet sanction of His presence.

Tell me, beloved brethren, to what does God give the sanction of His presence? He gives the sanction of His presence where there is faith to believe His word, where there is faith to confess the truth of God. No matter what the difficulties may be, no matter what the discouragements may be, never lower the standard. A person will say, "Oh, you must; it's no use talking like that; you must give it up: don't you see that God Himself is against you?" Governmentally, if you please — the blasphemer is being stoned without the camp, but the twelve loaves are undisturbed on the table. That is the principle — it is the double principle which overlaps the whole history of the ways of God, whether with Israel of old, or with the church now. The judgment of God may rest upon our practical state, while the eye of faith rests upon God's imperishable standard. Individual faith basks in the sunlight of God's eternal truth, spite of the wreck and ruin of the ostensible people of God.

This is a principle of the utmost simplicity, but of the greatest magnitude and practical value.

Its application to the special subject before us; namely, the unity of the Church of God, is as clear as it is forcible. If we look around us — if we judge by the sight of our eyes — if we form our conclusions amid the ruins of Christendom, it may seem an idle chimera to talk of the unity of the church of God. But no; we simply take God at His word; we believe what He says, not because we see it or feel it, but because He says it. This is faith. Why do we believe in the forgiveness of sins? Why do we believe in the presence of the Holy Ghost? Why do we believe in any one of the grand fundamental truths of Christianity? Simply because we find them on the eternal page of inspiration. Well, upon precisely the same ground

we believe in the one body and in the indissoluble unity of the church of God.

"There is one body." He does not say, "There *was* one body," and "There *shall* be one body." No; he says, "There is one body." Here is our authority for believing and confessing this glorious truth, and for our practical testimony against everything that denies it. The first step in confessing the unity of the church of God is to step out of the divisions of Christendom. Let us not stop to ask what is to be our second step. God never gives light for two steps at a time. Is it true that there is but one body? Unquestionably. God says so. Well then the divisions, the sects, and the systems of Christendom are plainly opposed to the mind and will and word of God. Truly so. What are we to do? Step out of them. This, we may rest assured, is *the* first step in a right direction. If our standpoint is false, our whole range of vision must be false. We must get to a true standpoint, and then our entire range is correct. It is impossible to yield any practical confession to the unity of the church of God while we stand connected with that which practically denies it. We may hold the theory in the region of our understanding, while we deny the reality in our practical career. But if we desire to confess the truth of the one body, our very first business — our primary duty is to stand in thorough separation from all the sects and schisms of Christendom.

"But," some may enquire, "Will not this involve the formation of a new sect, and that, too, the narrowest and most intolerant of all sects?" By no means. It may seem to be so, in the judgment of mere nature — even religious nature. But the question is, Are the divisions of Christendom according to God? Are the many bodies of the professing church in accordance with the "one body" of Ephesians 4? Clearly not. Then it is our divinely appointed duty to come out of them, and it is impossible that the discharge of a divinely enjoined duty can ever lead to sectarianism or schism; nay it is a direct and positive testimony against it; and, furthermore, the first grand step toward keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is to step out of the divisions of Christendom. And what then? Looking to Jesus; and this is to continue right on to the end. Is this — we repeat the question — to form a new sect, or join some new body? By no means; it is but fleeing from the ruins around us to find our resource

in the all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus. It is but leaving the ship at the bidding of Jesus, to keep the eye fixed on Him amid the wild watery waste, until we reach in safety the haven of everlasting rest and glory.

C. H. M.

Numbers 13

THE GRAPES OF ESHCOL

The grand principle of the divine life is faith — simple, earnest, wholehearted faith that just takes and enjoys all that God has given, faith that puts the soul in possession of eternal realities and maintains it therein habitually. This is true in reference to the people of God in all ages. “According to your faith, so be it unto you,” is ever the divine motto. There is no limit. All that God reveals, faith may have. All that faith can grasp, the soul may abidingly enjoy.

It is well to remember this. We all live very far below our privileges. Many are satisfied to move at a great distance from the blessed Center of all our joys. We are content with merely knowing salvation, while at the same time, we taste but little of holy communion with the Person of the Savior. We are satisfied with merely knowing that a relationship exists, without earnestly and jealousy cultivating the affections belonging thereto. This is the cause of much of our coldness and barrenness. As in the solar system the further a planet is from the sun the colder its climate and the slower its movement. So in the spiritual system, the further one moves from Christ, the colder will be the state of his heart toward Christ and the slower his movement for Christ. Fervor and rapidity will ever be the result of felt nearness to that central Sun, the great Fountain of heat and light.

The more we enter into the power of the love of Christ, the more we realize His abiding presence with us, the more intolerable we shall feel it to be away from Him. Everything will be dreaded and avoided which would tend to withdraw our hearts from Him or hide from our souls the light of His blessed countenance. The one who has really learned anything of the love of Christ cannot live without it; yes, it can part with all else for it. When away from Him, nothing is felt except the gloom of midnight and the chilling breath of winter, but in His presence the soul can mount upward like the lark as he rises into the bright blue heavens to salute with his cheerful song, the sun's morning beams.

Nothing exhibits more the deep-seated unbelief of our hearts than the fact that, while our God would have us enjoying communion with the very highest truths, few of us ever think of aspiring beyond the mere basics. Our hearts do not sigh after the highest walks of spiritual scholarship. We are satisfied with having the foundation laid, and are not as anxious as we should be to add layer after layer to the spiritual superstructure. Not that we can ever do without the foundation. This would be impossible. The most advanced scholar must carry the basics along with him, and the higher the building is raised, the more the need of a solid foundation is felt.

Let us look at Israel's case. Their history is full of rich instruction for us. It is "written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10: 11). We must contemplate them in three distinct positions — as sheltered by the blood, as victorious over Amalek and as introduced into the land of Canaan.

Now, clearly, an Israelite in the Land of Canaan had lost nothing of the value of the first two points. He was not the less shielded from judgment or delivered from the sword of Amalek because he was in the land of Canaan. No, the milk and honey, the grapes and pomegranates of that goodly land would but enhance the value of that precious blood which had preserved them from the sword of the destroyer and afford the most unquestionable evidence of their having passed beyond the cruel grasp of Amalek.

Still no one would say that an Israelite ought to have sought nothing beyond the blood-stained lintel. It is plain he ought to have fixed his steady gaze on the vine-clad hills of the promised land and said, "There lies my destined inheritance, and by the grace of Abraham's God, I shall never rest satisfied until I plant my foot triumphantly thereon." The blood-stained lintel was the starting post; the land of promise, the goal. It was Israel's high privilege not only to have the assurance of full deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh and the sword of Amalek, but also to cross the Jordan and pluck the mellow grapes of Eshcol. It was their sin and their shame that with the clusters of Eshcol before them, they could ever long after "the leeks, the onions and the garlic" of Egypt.

But how was this? What kept them back? Just that hateful thing which, from day to day and hour to hour, robs us of the precious privilege of treading the very highest stages of the divine life. And what is that? *Unbelief!* "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3: 19). This caused Israel to wander in the desert for 40 tedious years. Instead of looking at Jehovah's power to bring them into the land, they looked at the enemy's power to keep them out of it. Thus they failed. In vain did the spies, whom they themselves proposed to send (Deut. 1: 22*), bring back a most attractive report of the character of the land. In vain did the spies display in Israel's view a cluster of the grapes of Eshcol, so luxuriant that two men had to bear it upon a staff. All was useless. The spirit of unbelief had taken possession of their hearts. It was one thing to admire the grapes of Eshcol when brought to their tent doors by the energy of others, and quite another to move onward in the energy of *personal faith* and pluck those grapes for themselves.

{*It is important to note that the proposal to send the spies originated with Israel. "And ye came near unto me, every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come" (Deut. 1: 22). An artless faith would have taught them that the One who had conducted them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and across the desert, could and would lead them onward into Canaan, show them the way, and tell them all about it. But, alas! they wanted an arm of flesh. The chariot of Jehovah, moving majestically before the host, was not sufficient for them. They would "send men before them." God was not sufficient, Ah! what hearts we have! How little we know and hence how little we trust God!

Some, however may ask, "Did not the Lord command Moses to send the spies?" (Num. 13: 1-3). True; and the Lord commanded Samuel to anoint a king over Israel (1 Sam. 8: 22). Did this clear them of the sin of asking for a king and thus rejecting Jehovah? Surely not. Well, then, the same holds good with respect to the spies. The unbelief of the people led them to ask for spies, and Jehovah gave them spies. The same unbelief led them to ask for a king, and Jehovah gave them a king. "He gave them their request;

but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 56: 15). How often this is the case with us!}

And if "twelve men" could get to Eshcol, why not 600,000? Could not the same hand that shielded the one, shield the other likewise? Faith says "Yes." But unbelief shrinks from responsibility and recoils before difficulty. The people were no more willing to advance after the spies returned than before they set out. They were in a state of unbelief, first and last. And what was the result? That out of 600,000 which came up out of Egypt, only *two* had sufficient energy to plant their foot in the land of Canaan. This tells a tale. It utters a voice. It teaches a lesson. May we have ears to hear and hearts to understand.

It may be said by some that the time had not yet arrived for Israel's entrance into the land of Canaan inasmuch as "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." This is but a one-sided view of the subject and we must look at both sides. The apostle expressly declares that Israel "could not enter in *because of unbelief*." He does not assign as a reason "the iniquity of the Amorites" or any secret counsel of God with respect to the Amorites. He simply gives as a reason, the unbelief of the people. They might have got in if they would.

Nothing can be more unwarrantable than to make use of the unsearchable counsels and decrees of God to throw overboard man's solemn responsibility. It will never do. Are we to fold our arms and lie back in the indolence of unbelief because of God's eternal decrees about which we know nothing? To say so can only be viewed as a piece of monstrous extravagance, the sure result of pushing one truth to such an extreme as to interfere with the range and action of some other truth equally important. We must give each and every truth its due place. We should not run one truth to seed while some other truth is not even allowed to take root. We know that unless God blesses the labors of the farmer there will be no crop at the time of harvest. Does this prevent the diligent use of the plough and the harrow? Surely not, for the same God who has appointed the crop as the end, has appointed patient labor as the means.

Thus it is also in the spiritual world. God's appointed end must never be separated from God's appointed means. Had Israel trusted God and gone up, the whole assembly might have delighted themselves on Eshcol's luxuriant clusters. This they did not do. The grapes were lovely: this was obvious to all. The spies were constrained to admit that the land flowed with milk and honey. But there was sure to be a "nevertheless." Why? Because they were not trusting in God. He had already declared to Moses the character of the land and His testimony ought to have been amply sufficient. He had said in the most unqualified manner, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3: 8). Should not this have been sufficient? Was not Jehovah's description much more trustworthy than man's? Yes, to faith, but not to unbelief. Unbelief can never be satisfied with divine testimony, it must have the testimony of the senses. God had said it was "a land flowing with milk and honey." This the spies admitted. But hear the additions. "Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land and the cities are walled and very great; and moreover, we saw the children of Anak there and there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight" (Num. 14: 28).

Thus it was with them. They only "saw" the frowning walls and towering giants. They did not see Jehovah because they looked with the eye of sense and not with the eye of faith. God was shut out. He never gets a place in the calculations of unbelief. It can see walls and giants, but it cannot see God. It is only faith that can "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." The spies could declare what they were in their own sight and in the sight of the giants, but not a word about what they were in God's sight. They never thought of this. The land was all that could be desired, but the difficulties were too great for them. They had not faith to trust God. The mission of the spies proved a failure. Israel "despised the pleasant land" and "in their hearts, turned back again into Egypt."

This is the sum of the matter. Unbelief kept Israel from plucking the grapes of Eshcol and sent them back to wander for 40

years in the wilderness. These things, be it remembered, “were written for our admonition.” May we deeply and prayerfully ponder the lesson! Out of 600,000 who came up out of Egypt, only two planted their foot on the fruitful hills of Palestine! Israel passed the Red Sea, triumphed over Amalek, but drew back in fear and retreated before “the sons of Anak,” though these latter were no more to Jehovah than the former.

Now, let the Christian reader ponder all this. The special object of this paper is to encourage him to arise and in the energy of a full, unqualified trust in Christ, tread the very highest stages of the life of faith. Having our solid foundation laid in the blood of the cross, it is our privilege not only to be victorious over Amalek (indwelling sin) but also to taste of the old corn of the land of Canaan, to pluck the grapes of Eshcol and delight ourselves in its flowing tide of milk and honey: in other words, to enter into the living and elevated experiences which flow from habitual fellowship with a risen Christ with whom we are linked in the power of an endless life. It is one thing to know that our sins are cancelled by the blood of Christ. It is another thing to know that Christ has destroyed the power of indwelling sin. And it is a still higher thing to live in unbroken fellowship with Himself.

It is not that we lose the sense of the two former when living in the power of the latter. Quite the opposite. The more closely I walk with Christ, the more I have Him dwelling in my heart by faith, the more I shall value all He has done for me, both in the putting away of my sins and in the entire subjugation of my evil nature. The higher the superstructure rises the more I shall value the solid foundation beneath. It is a great mistake to suppose that those who move in the higher spheres of spiritual life could ever undervalue the title by which they do so. Oh! no; the language of those who have passed into the innermost circle of the upper sanctuary is, “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” They talk of the love of Christ's heart and the blood of His cross. The nearer they approach to the throne, the more they enter into the value of that which placed them on such a delightful elevation. And so with us; the more we breathe the air of the divine presence, the more we tread in spirit the courts of the heavenly sanctuary, the

more highly shall we estimate the riches of redeeming love. It is as we pluck the grapes of Eshcol in the heavenly Canaan, that we have the deepest sense of the value of that precious blood which shielded us from the sword of the destroyer.

Let us not, therefore, be deterred from aiming after a higher consecration of heart to Christ by a false fear of undervaluing those precious truths which filled our hearts with heavenly peace when first we started on our Christian career. The enemy will use anything and everything to keep the spiritual Israel from planting the foot of faith in the spiritual Canaan. He will seek to keep them occupied with themselves and with the difficulties which attend upon their upward and onward course. He knows that when one has really eaten of the grapes of Eshcol, it is no longer a question of escaping from Pharaoh or Amalek. Hence he sets before them the walls, the giants and their own nothingness, weakness and unworthiness. But the answer is simple and conclusive. It is this: trust! trust! trust! Yes, from the blood-stained lintel in Egypt to the rare and exquisite clusters of Eshcol, it is all simple, unqualified, unquestioning trust in Christ. "By faith they kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood" and "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down" (Heb. 11). From the starting post to the goal, and at every intermediate stage, "The just shall live by faith."

But let us never forget that this faith involves the full surrender of the heart to Christ, as well as the full acceptance of Christ for the heart. Reader, let us ponder this deeply. It must be wholly Christ for the heart and the heart wholly for Christ. To separate these things is to be "like a rowboat with only one oar, which goes round and round, but makes no progress. It only drifts with the stream, whirling as it drifts. Or like a bird with a broken wing, whirling over and over, and falling as it whirls." This is too much lost sight of. Hence, the uncertain course and fluctuating experience. There is no progress. People cannot expect to get on with Christ in one hand and the world in the other. We can never feast on "the grapes of Eshcol" while our hearts are longing after "the flesh pots of Egypt."

May the Lord grant us a whole heart, a single eye, an upright mind. May the one commanding object of our souls be to mount

upward and onward. Having all divinely and eternally settled by the blood of the cross, may we press forward with holy energy and decision “toward the mark, for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

“O wondrous grace! O love divine!

To give us such a home;

Let us the present things resign,

And seek the rest to come;

And gazing on our Savior's cross,

Esteem all else but dung and dross:

Press forward till the race be run;

Fight till the crown of life be won.”

Numbers 13

THE GRAPES OF ESHCOL

The grand principle of the divine life is faith — simple, earnest, wholehearted faith that just takes and enjoys all that God has given, faith that puts the soul in possession of eternal realities and maintains it therein habitually. This is true in reference to the people of God in all ages. “According to your faith, so be it unto you,” is ever the divine motto. There is no limit. All that God reveals, faith may have. All that faith can grasp, the soul may abidingly enjoy.

It is well to remember this. We all live very far below our privileges. Many are satisfied to move at a great distance from the blessed Center of all our joys. We are content with merely knowing salvation, while at the same time, we taste but little of holy communion with the Person of the Savior. We are satisfied with merely knowing that a relationship exists, without earnestly and jealousy cultivating the affections belonging thereto. This is the cause of much of our coldness and barrenness. As in the solar system the further a planet is from the sun the colder its climate and the slower its movement. So in the spiritual system, the further one moves from Christ, the colder will be the state of his heart toward Christ and the slower his movement for Christ. Fervor and rapidity will ever be the result of felt nearness to that central Sun, the great Fountain of heat and light.

The more we enter into the power of the love of Christ, the more we realize His abiding presence with us, the more intolerable we shall feel it to be away from Him. Everything will be dreaded and avoided which would tend to withdraw our hearts from Him or hide from our souls the light of His blessed countenance. The one who has really learned anything of the love of Christ cannot live without it; yes, it can part with all else for it. When away from Him, nothing is felt except the gloom of midnight and the chilling breath of winter, but in His presence the soul can mount upward like the lark as he rises into the bright blue heavens to salute with his cheerful song, the sun's morning beams.

Nothing exhibits more the deep-seated unbelief of our hearts than the fact that, while our God would have us enjoying communion with the very highest truths, few of us ever think of aspiring beyond the mere basics. Our hearts do not sigh after the highest walks of spiritual scholarship. We are satisfied with having the foundation laid, and are not as anxious as we should be to add layer after layer to the spiritual superstructure. Not that we can ever do without the foundation. This would be impossible. The most advanced scholar must carry the basics along with him, and the higher the building is raised, the more the need of a solid foundation is felt.

Let us look at Israel's case. Their history is full of rich instruction for us. It is "written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10: 11). We must contemplate them in three distinct positions — as sheltered by the blood, as victorious over Amalek and as introduced into the land of Canaan.

Now, clearly, an Israelite in the Land of Canaan had lost nothing of the value of the first two points. He was not the less shielded from judgment or delivered from the sword of Amalek because he was in the land of Canaan. No, the milk and honey, the grapes and pomegranates of that goodly land would but enhance the value of that precious blood which had preserved them from the sword of the destroyer and afford the most unquestionable evidence of their having passed beyond the cruel grasp of Amalek.

Still no one would say that an Israelite ought to have sought nothing beyond the blood-stained lintel. It is plain he ought to have fixed his steady gaze on the vine-clad hills of the promised land and said, "There lies my destined inheritance, and by the grace of Abraham's God, I shall never rest satisfied until I plant my foot triumphantly thereon." The blood-stained lintel was the starting post; the land of promise, the goal. It was Israel's high privilege not only to have the assurance of full deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh and the sword of Amalek, but also to cross the Jordan and pluck the mellow grapes of Eshcol. It was their sin and their shame that with the clusters of Eshcol before them, they could ever long after "the leeks, the onions and the garlic" of Egypt.

But how was this? What kept them back? Just that hateful thing which, from day to day and hour to hour, robs us of the precious privilege of treading the very highest stages of the divine life. And what is that? *Unbelief!* "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3: 19). This caused Israel to wander in the desert for 40 tedious years. Instead of looking at Jehovah's power to bring them into the land, they looked at the enemy's power to keep them out of it. Thus they failed. In vain did the spies, whom they themselves proposed to send (Deut. 1: 22*), bring back a most attractive report of the character of the land. In vain did the spies display in Israel's view a cluster of the grapes of Eshcol, so luxuriant that two men had to bear it upon a staff. All was useless. The spirit of unbelief had taken possession of their hearts. It was one thing to admire the grapes of Eshcol when brought to their tent doors by the energy of others, and quite another to move onward in the energy of *personal faith* and pluck those grapes for themselves.

{*It is important to note that the proposal to send the spies originated with Israel. "And ye came near unto me, every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come" (Deut. 1: 22). An artless faith would have taught them that the One who had conducted them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and across the desert, could and would lead them onward into Canaan, show them the way, and tell them all about it. But, alas! they wanted an arm of flesh. The chariot of Jehovah, moving majestically before the host, was not sufficient for them. They would "send men before them." God was not sufficient, Ah! what hearts we have! How little we know and hence how little we trust God!

Some, however may ask, "Did not the Lord command Moses to send the spies?" (Num. 13: 1-3). True; and the Lord commanded Samuel to anoint a king over Israel (1 Sam. 8: 22). Did this clear them of the sin of asking for a king and thus rejecting Jehovah? Surely not. Well, then, the same holds good with respect to the spies. The unbelief of the people led them to ask for spies, and Jehovah gave them spies. The same unbelief led them to ask for a king, and Jehovah gave them a king. "He gave them their request;

but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 56: 15). How often this is the case with us!}

And if "twelve men" could get to Eshcol, why not 600,000? Could not the same hand that shielded the one, shield the other likewise? Faith says "Yes." But unbelief shrinks from responsibility and recoils before difficulty. The people were no more willing to advance after the spies returned than before they set out. They were in a state of unbelief, first and last. And what was the result? That out of 600,000 which came up out of Egypt, only *two* had sufficient energy to plant their foot in the land of Canaan. This tells a tale. It utters a voice. It teaches a lesson. May we have ears to hear and hearts to understand.

It may be said by some that the time had not yet arrived for Israel's entrance into the land of Canaan inasmuch as "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." This is but a one-sided view of the subject and we must look at both sides. The apostle expressly declares that Israel "could not enter in *because of unbelief*." He does not assign as a reason "the iniquity of the Amorites" or any secret counsel of God with respect to the Amorites. He simply gives as a reason, the unbelief of the people. They might have got in if they would.

Nothing can be more unwarrantable than to make use of the unsearchable counsels and decrees of God to throw overboard man's solemn responsibility. It will never do. Are we to fold our arms and lie back in the indolence of unbelief because of God's eternal decrees about which we know nothing? To say so can only be viewed as a piece of monstrous extravagance, the sure result of pushing one truth to such an extreme as to interfere with the range and action of some other truth equally important. We must give each and every truth its due place. We should not run one truth to seed while some other truth is not even allowed to take root. We know that unless God blesses the labors of the farmer there will be no crop at the time of harvest. Does this prevent the diligent use of the plough and the harrow? Surely not, for the same God who has appointed the crop as the end, has appointed patient labor as the means.

Thus it is also in the spiritual world. God's appointed end must never be separated from God's appointed means. Had Israel trusted God and gone up, the whole assembly might have delighted themselves on Eshcol's luxuriant clusters. This they did not do. The grapes were lovely: this was obvious to all. The spies were constrained to admit that the land flowed with milk and honey. But there was sure to be a "nevertheless." Why? Because they were not trusting in God. He had already declared to Moses the character of the land and His testimony ought to have been amply sufficient. He had said in the most unqualified manner, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3: 8). Should not this have been sufficient? Was not Jehovah's description much more trustworthy than man's? Yes, to faith, but not to unbelief. Unbelief can never be satisfied with divine testimony, it must have the testimony of the senses. God had said it was "a land flowing with milk and honey." This the spies admitted. But hear the additions. "Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land and the cities are walled and very great; and moreover, we saw the children of Anak there and there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight" (Num. 14: 28).

Thus it was with them. They only "saw" the frowning walls and towering giants. They did not see Jehovah because they looked with the eye of sense and not with the eye of faith. God was shut out. He never gets a place in the calculations of unbelief. It can see walls and giants, but it cannot see God. It is only faith that can "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." The spies could declare what they were in their own sight and in the sight of the giants, but not a word about what they were in God's sight. They never thought of this. The land was all that could be desired, but the difficulties were too great for them. They had not faith to trust God. The mission of the spies proved a failure. Israel "despised the pleasant land" and "in their hearts, turned back again into Egypt."

This is the sum of the matter. Unbelief kept Israel from plucking the grapes of Eshcol and sent them back to wander for 40

years in the wilderness. These things, be it remembered, “were written for our admonition.” May we deeply and prayerfully ponder the lesson! Out of 600,000 who came up out of Egypt, only two planted their foot on the fruitful hills of Palestine! Israel passed the Red Sea, triumphed over Amalek, but drew back in fear and retreated before “the sons of Anak,” though these latter were no more to Jehovah than the former.

Now, let the Christian reader ponder all this. The special object of this paper is to encourage him to arise and in the energy of a full, unqualified trust in Christ, tread the very highest stages of the life of faith. Having our solid foundation laid in the blood of the cross, it is our privilege not only to be victorious over Amalek (indwelling sin) but also to taste of the old corn of the land of Canaan, to pluck the grapes of Eshcol and delight ourselves in its flowing tide of milk and honey: in other words, to enter into the living and elevated experiences which flow from habitual fellowship with a risen Christ with whom we are linked in the power of an endless life. It is one thing to know that our sins are cancelled by the blood of Christ. It is another thing to know that Christ has destroyed the power of indwelling sin. And it is a still higher thing to live in unbroken fellowship with Himself.

It is not that we lose the sense of the two former when living in the power of the latter. Quite the opposite. The more closely I walk with Christ, the more I have Him dwelling in my heart by faith, the more I shall value all He has done for me, both in the putting away of my sins and in the entire subjugation of my evil nature. The higher the superstructure rises the more I shall value the solid foundation beneath. It is a great mistake to suppose that those who move in the higher spheres of spiritual life could ever undervalue the title by which they do so. Oh! no; the language of those who have passed into the innermost circle of the upper sanctuary is, “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” They talk of the love of Christ's heart and the blood of His cross. The nearer they approach to the throne, the more they enter into the value of that which placed them on such a delightful elevation. And so with us; the more we breathe the air of the divine presence, the more we tread in spirit the courts of the heavenly sanctuary, the

more highly shall we estimate the riches of redeeming love. It is as we pluck the grapes of Eshcol in the heavenly Canaan, that we have the deepest sense of the value of that precious blood which shielded us from the sword of the destroyer.

Let us not, therefore, be deterred from aiming after a higher consecration of heart to Christ by a false fear of undervaluing those precious truths which filled our hearts with heavenly peace when first we started on our Christian career. The enemy will use anything and everything to keep the spiritual Israel from planting the foot of faith in the spiritual Canaan. He will seek to keep them occupied with themselves and with the difficulties which attend upon their upward and onward course. He knows that when one has really eaten of the grapes of Eshcol, it is no longer a question of escaping from Pharaoh or Amalek. Hence he sets before them the walls, the giants and their own nothingness, weakness and unworthiness. But the answer is simple and conclusive. It is this: trust! trust! trust! Yes, from the blood-stained lintel in Egypt to the rare and exquisite clusters of Eshcol, it is all simple, unqualified, unquestioning trust in Christ. "By faith they kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood" and "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down" (Heb. 11). From the starting post to the goal, and at every intermediate stage, "The just shall live by faith."

But let us never forget that this faith involves the full surrender of the heart to Christ, as well as the full acceptance of Christ for the heart. Reader, let us ponder this deeply. It must be wholly Christ for the heart and the heart wholly for Christ. To separate these things is to be "like a rowboat with only one oar, which goes round and round, but makes no progress. It only drifts with the stream, whirling as it drifts. Or like a bird with a broken wing, whirling over and over, and falling as it whirls." This is too much lost sight of. Hence, the uncertain course and fluctuating experience. There is no progress. People cannot expect to get on with Christ in one hand and the world in the other. We can never feast on "the grapes of Eshcol" while our hearts are longing after "the flesh pots of Egypt."

May the Lord grant us a whole heart, a single eye, an upright mind. May the one commanding object of our souls be to mount

upward and onward. Having all divinely and eternally settled by the blood of the cross, may we press forward with holy energy and decision “toward the mark, for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

“O wondrous grace! O love divine!

To give us such a home;

Let us the present things resign,

And seek the rest to come;

And gazing on our Savior's cross,

Esteem all else but dung and dross:

Press forward till the race be run;

Fight till the crown of life be won.”

Deuteronomy 8: 1-9

FOUR POINTS OF KNOWLEDGE

In these verses we have four valuable points of knowledge connected with our walk through the wilderness, namely the knowledge of ourselves, the knowledge of God, the knowledge of our relationship, and the knowledge of our hope.

First, as to the knowledge of self, we read, “Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart.” Here is a wondrous point of knowledge. Who can say it? Who can penetrate the depths of a human heart? Who can tell its windings and labyrinths? The details of a wilderness life tend to bring out much of the evil that is in us. At the beginning of our Christian career, we are apt to be so occupied with the present joy of deliverance that we know very little of the real character of nature. It is as we get on, from stage to stage of our desert course, that we become acquainted with self.

Secondly, we are not to suppose that, as we grow in self-knowledge, our joy must decline. Quite the opposite. This would be to make our joy depend upon ignorance of self, whereas it really depends upon the knowledge of God. In point of fact, as the believer advances in the knowledge of himself, his joy becomes deeper and more solid, since he is led more thoroughly out of and away from himself, to find his sole object in Christ. He learns that nature's total ruin is not merely a true doctrine of the Christian faith, but a deep reality in his own experience. He also learns that divine grace is a reality; that salvation is a deep, personal reality; that sin is a reality; the cross a reality; the advocacy of Christ, a reality. He learns the depth, the fullness, the power, the application of God's gracious resources. “He humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger,” not that you might be driven to despair, but that He might “feed thee with manna which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that He might make thee to know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth

man live. Thy raiment became not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.”

Touching and beautiful appeal! “Forty years” of evidence of what was in the heart of God toward His redeemed people. “Six hundred thousand footmen” clothed, fed, kept and cared for during “forty years” in “a vast howling wilderness!” What a noble and soul-satisfying display of the fullness of divine resources! How is it possible that, with the history of Israel's desert wanderings lying open before us, we could ever harbor a single doubt or fear? Oh! that our hearts may be more completely emptied of self, for this is true humility, and more completely filled with Christ, for this is true happiness and true holiness. “For the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand; He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee, *thou hast lacked nothing*” (Deut. 2: 7).

Thirdly, all we have been dwelling upon flows out of another thing, and that is the relationship in which we stand. “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee.” This accounts for all. The hunger and the food, the thirst and the water, the trackless desert and the guiding pillar, the toil and the refreshment, the sickness and the healing — all tell of the same thing, a Father's hand, a Father's heart. It is well to remember this “lest we be weary and faint in our minds” (Heb. 12). An earthly father will have to use the rod of discipline as well as to imprint the kiss of affection, to administer the rebuke as well as express his approval, to chasten as well as minister supplies. Thus it is with our heavenly Father. All His dealings flow out of that marvelous relationship which He stands towards us. He is a “Holy Father.” All is summed up in this. Our Father is the “Holy One;” “the Holy One” is our Father. To walk with, lean on and imitate Him “as dear children,” must secure everything in the way of genuine happiness, real strength and true holiness. When we walk with Him, we are happy; when we lean on Him, we are strong; and when we imitate Him, we are practically holy and gracious.

Finally, in the midst of all the exercises, the trials, the conflicts, and even the mercies and privileges of the wilderness, we must keep the eye steadily fixed on that which lies before us. The

joys of the kingdom are to fill our hearts and give vigor and buoyancy to our steps as we pass across the desert. The green fields and vine-clad hills of the heavenly Canaan, the pearly gates and golden streets of the New Jerusalem are to fill the vision of our souls. We are called to cherish the hope of glory, a hope which will never make ashamed. When the sand of the desert tries us, let the thought of Canaan cheer us. Let us dwell upon the “inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us” (1 Peter 1: 4). “For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.” Bright and blessed prospect! May we dwell upon it and upon Him who will be the eternal source of all its brightness and blessedness!

“To Canaan's sacred bound

We haste with songs of joy,

Where peace and liberty are found,

And sweets that never cloy;

Hallelujah!

We are on our way to God!

“How sweet the prospect is!

It cheers the pilgrim's breast;

We're journeying through the wilderness,

But soon we'll gain our rest.

Hallelujah!

We are on our way to God!”

Deuteronomy 19:14

Landmarks and Stumblingblocks

- The Doctrine of Election Misplaced.

"Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old have set in thine inheritance" (Deut. 19: 14).

"Take up the stumblingblock out of the way of My people" (Isa. 57: 14).

What tender care, what gracious considerateness, breathe in the above passages! The ancient landmarks were not to be removed; but the stumblingblocks were to be taken up. The inheritance of God's people was to stand entire and unchanged, while the stumblingblocks were to be sedulously removed out of their pathway. Such was the grace and care of God for His people! The portion which God had given to each was to be enjoyed, while, at the same time, the path in which each was called to walk should be kept free from every occasion of stumbling.

Now, judging from recent communications, we believe we are called upon to give attention to the spirit of those ancient enactments. Some of our friends have, in their letters to us, opened the minds very freely as to their spiritual condition. They have told us of their doubts and fears, their difficulties and dangers, their conflicts and exercises. We are truly grateful for such confidence; and it is our earnest desire to be used of God to help our readers by pointing out the landmarks which He, by His Spirit, has set up, and thus remove the stumblingblocks which the enemy diligently flings in their path.

In pondering the cases which have lately been submitted to us, we have found some in which the enemy was manifestly using as a stumblingblock the doctrine of election *misplaced*. The doctrine of election, in its right place, instead of being a stumblingblock in the pathway of anxious inquirers, will be found to be a landmark set by them of old time, even by the inspired apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the inheritance of God's spiritual Israel.

But we all know that *misplaced* truth is more dangerous than positive error. If a man were to stand up, and boldly declare that the doctrine of election is false, we should without hesitation reject his words; but we might not be quite so well prepared to meet one who, while admitting the doctrine to be true and important, puts it out of its divinely appointed place. This latter is the very thing which is so constantly done, to the damaging of the truth of God, and the darkening of the souls of men.

What, then, is the true place of the doctrine of election? Its true, its divinely appointed place, is for those within the house — for the establishment of true *believers*. Instead of this, the enemy puts it *outside* the house, for the stumbling of anxious *inquirers*. Harken to the following language of a deeply exercised soul: "If I only knew that I was one of the elect I should be quite happy, inasmuch as I could then confidently apply to myself the benefits of the death of Christ."

Doubtless, this would be the language of many, were they only to tell out the feelings of their hearts. They are making a wrong use of the doctrine of election — a doctrine blessedly true in itself — a most valuable "landmark," but made a "stumblingblock" by the enemy. It is very needful for the anxious inquirer to bear in mind that it is *as a lost sinner*, and not as "one of the elect," that he can apply to himself the benefits of the death of Christ.

The proper stand-point from which to get a saving view of the death of Christ is not election, but *the consciousness of our ruin*. This is an unspeakable mercy, inasmuch as I *know* I am a lost sinner; but I do *not* know that I am one of the elect, until I have received, through the Spirit's testimony and teaching, the glad tidings of salvation through the blood of the Lamb. Salvation — free as the sunbeams, full as the ocean, permanent as the throne of the eternal God — *is preached* to me, *not* as one of the elect, but as one *utterly lost*, guilty, and undone; and when I have received this salvation there is conclusive evidence of my election.

"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God; for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1: 4-5). Election is

not my warrant for accepting salvation; but the reception of salvation is the proof of election. For how is any sinner to know that he is one of the elect? Where is he to find it? It must be a matter of divine revelation, else it cannot be a matter of faith. But where is it revealed? Where is the knowledge of election made an indispensable prerequisite, an essential preliminary, to the acceptance of salvation? Nowhere, in the Word of God. My only title to salvation is, that I am a poor guilty, hell-deserving sinner. If I wait for any other title, I am only removing a most valuable landmark from its proper place, and putting it as a stumblingblock in my way. This, to say the least of it, is very unwise.

But it is more than unwise. It is positive opposition to the Word of God; not only to the quotations which stand at the head of this paper, but to the spirit and teaching of the entire volume. Harken to the risen Saviour's commission to His first heralds: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to *every* creature" (Mark 16: 15). Is there so much as a single point, in these words, on which to base a question about election? Is any one, to whom this glorious gospel is preached, called to settle a prior question about his election? Assuredly not.

"All the world" and "every creature" are expressions which set aside every difficulty, and render salvation as free as the air, and as wide as the human family. It is not said, "Go ye into a given section of the world, and preach the gospel to a certain number." No; this would not be in keeping with that grace which was to be proclaimed to the wide, wide world. When the law was in question, it was addressed to a certain number, in a given section; but when the gospel was to be proclaimed, its mighty range was to be, "All the world," and its object, "Every creature."

Again, hear what the Holy Ghost saith, by the apostle Paul: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of *all* acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*" (1 Tim. 1: 15). Is there any room here for raising a question as to one's title to salvation? None whatever. If Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and if I am a sinner, then I am entitled to apply to my own soul the benefits of His precious sacrifice. Ere I can possibly exclude myself therefrom I must be something else than a sinner. If it were

anywhere declared in Scripture that Christ Jesus came to save only the elect, then clearly I should, in some way or another, prove myself one of that number, ere I could make my own the benefits of His death. But, thanks be to God, there is nothing the least like this in the whole gospel scheme.

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was *lost*" (Luke 19: 10). And is not that just what I am? Truly so. Well then, is it not from the standpoint of a lost one that I am to look at the death of Christ? Doubtless. And can I not, while contemplating that precious mystery from thence, adopt the language of faith, and say, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*"? Yes, as unreservedly and unconditionally as though I were the only sinner on the surface of the globe.

Nothing can be more soothing and tranquillising to the spirit of an anxious inquirer than to mark the way in which salvation is brought to him in the very condition in which he is, and on the very ground which he occupies. There is not so much as a single stumblingblock along the entire path leading to the glorious inheritance of the saints — an inheritance settled by landmarks which neither men nor devils can ever remove.

The God of all grace has left nothing undone, nothing unsaid, which could possibly give rest, assurance, and perfect satisfaction to the soul. He has set forth the very condition and character of those for whom Christ died, in such terms as to leave no room for any demur or hesitation. Listen to the following glowing words: "For when we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died *for the ungodly*." "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us." "For if, *when we were enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5: 6, 8, 10).

Can anything be plainer or more pointed than these passages? Is there a single term made use of which could possibly raise a question in the heart of any sinner as to his full and undisputed title to the benefits of the death of Christ? Not one. Am I "ungodly?" It was for such Christ died. Am I "a sinner?" It is to such that God

commendeth His love. Am I "an enemy?" It is such God reconciles by the death of His Son.

Thus all is made as plain as a sunbeam; and as for the theological stumblingblock caused by misplacing the doctrine of election, it is entirely removed. It is as a sinner I get the benefit of Christ's death. It is as a lost one I get a salvation which is as free as it is permanent, and as permanent as it is free. All I want, in order to apply to myself the value of the blood of Jesus, is to know myself a guilty *sinner*. It would not help me the least in this matter to be told that I am one of the elect, inasmuch as it is not in that character God addresses me in the gospel, but in another character altogether, even as a *lost* sinner.

But then, some may feel disposed to ask, "Do you want to set aside the doctrine of election?" God forbid. We only want to see it in its right place. We want it as a landmark, not as a stumblingblock. We believe the evangelist has no business to *preach* election. Paul never preached election. He *taught* election, but he preached Christ. This makes all the difference. We believe that no one can be a proper evangelist who is, in any wise, hampered by the doctrine of election misplaced. We have seen serious damage done to two classes of people by preaching election instead of preaching Christ. Careless sinners are made more careless still, while anxious souls have had their anxiety intensified.

These, surely, are sad results, and they ought to be sufficient to awaken very serious thoughts in the minds of all who desire to be successful preachers of that free and full salvation which shines in the gospel of Christ, and leaves all who hear it without a shadow of an excuse. The grand business of the evangelist is to set forth, in his preaching, the perfect love of God, the efficacy of the blood of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost. His spirit should be entirely untrammelled, and his gospel unclouded. He should preach a present salvation, free to all, and stable as the pillars which support the throne of God. The gospel is the unfolding of the heart of God as expressed in the death of His Son, recorded by the Holy Spirit.

Were this more carefully attended to, there would be more power in replying to the oft-repeated objection of the careless, as well as in hushing the deep anxieties of exercised and burdened souls. The former would have no just ground of objection; the latter, no reason to fear. When persons reject the gospel on the ground of God's eternal decrees, they are rejecting what is *revealed* on the ground of what is *hidden*. What can they possibly know about God's decrees? Just nothing. How then can that which is secret be urged as a reason for rejecting what is revealed? Why refuse what *can* be known, on the ground of what *cannot*? It is obvious that men do not act thus in cases where they wish to believe a matter. Only let a man be willing to believe a thing, and you will not find him anxiously looking for a ground of objection. But alas! men do not want to believe God. They reject His precious testimony which is as clear as the sun in meridian brightness, and urge, as their plea for so doing, His decrees which are wrapped in impenetrable darkness. What folly! What blindness! What guilt!

And then as to anxious souls who harass themselves with questions about election, we long to show them that it is not in accordance with the divine mind that they should raise any such difficulty. God addresses them in the exact state in which He sees them and in which they can see themselves. He addresses them as *sinner*s, and this is exactly what they are. *There is nothing but salvation for any sinner, the moment he takes his true place as a sinner.* This is simple enough for any simple soul. To raise questions about election is sheer unbelief. It is, in another way, to reject what is revealed on the ground of what is hidden; it is to refuse what I *can* know, on the ground of what I *cannot*.

God has revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, so that we may know Him and trust Him. Moreover, He has made full provision in the atonement of the cross for all our need and all our guilt. Hence, therefore instead of perplexing myself with the question, "Am I one of the elect?" it is my happy privilege to rest in the perfect love of God, the all-sufficiency of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost.

We must close, though there are other stumblingblocks which we long to see removed out of the way of God's people, as well as landmarks which are sadly lost sight of.

Deuteronomy 20:1-9

PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Privilege and responsibility! Yes, this is the divine order, and how important it is in dealing with the things of God to place them in the order in which He places them and leave them there! The human mind is ever prone to displace things. Hence it is that we so frequently find the responsibilities which belong to the people of God, pressed upon those who are yet in their sins. This is a great mistake. I must be in a position before I can fulfill the responsibilities attaching thereto. I must be in a relationship before I can know the affections which belong to it. If I am not a father, how can I know or exhibit the affections of a father's heart? Impossible. I may speak about them and attempt to describe them, but in order to feel them I must be a father.

Thus it is in the things of God. I must be in a position before I can enter into the responsibilities which belong to it. I must be in a relationship before I can understand the affections which flow out of it. Man has been tested in every possible way. He has been tried in creation. He has been tried under divine government. He has been tried under law. He has been tried with ordinances. He has been tried by the ministry of the prophets. He has been tried by the ministry of righteousness in the person of John the Baptist. He has been tried by the ministry of grace in the person of Christ. He has been tried by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. What has been the result? Total failure! An unbroken chain of testimony from Paradise to Pentecost has only tended to make manifest man's utter failure in every possible way. In every position of responsibility in which man has been set, he has broken down. Not so much as a single exception can be shown.

So much for man's responsibility. He has proven himself unfaithful in everything. He has not a single inch of ground to stand upon. He has destroyed himself, but in God is his help. Grace has come in, in the Person of Christ, and perfectly met man's desperate case. The cross is the divine remedy for all the ruin, and by that cross the believer is introduced into a place of divine and everlasting

privilege. Christ has met all the need, answered all the demands, discharged all the responsibilities, and having done so by His death upon the cross, He has become in resurrection, the basis of all the believer's privileges. We have all in Christ, and we get Him, not because we have fulfilled our responsibilities, but because God loved us even when we had failed in everything. We find ourselves, unconditionally, in a place of unspeakable privilege. We did not work ourselves into it, we did not weep ourselves into it, we did not pray ourselves into it, we did not fast ourselves into it. We were taken up from the depth of our ruin, from that deep pit into which we had fallen as a result of having failed in all our responsibilities. We have been set down by God's free grace in a position of unspeakable blessedness and privilege, of which nothing can ever deprive us. Not all the powers of hell and earth combined, not all the evil of Satan and his emissaries, not all the power of sin, death and the grave, arrayed in their most terrific form, can ever rob the believer in Jesus of that place of privilege in which, through grace, he stands.

My reader cannot be too simple in his apprehension of this. We do not reach our place of privilege as the result of faithfulness in the place of responsibility. Quite the reverse. We have failed in everything. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We deserved death, but we have received life. We deserved hell, but we have received heaven. We deserved eternal wrath, but we have received eternal favor. Grace has entered the scene and it "reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Hence, in the economy of grace, *privilege* becomes the basis of responsibility, and this is beautifully illustrated in the passage of Scripture which stands at the head of this paper. I shall quote it for my reader. "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them, for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people and shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel; ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies; let not your hearts faint; fear not and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; for the

Lord your God is He that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

Here we have Israel's privileges distinctly set forth. “The Lord thy God is with thee,” and that in the very character in which He had brought them out of the land of Egypt. He was with them in the power of that sovereign grace which had delivered them from the iron grasp of Pharaoh and the iron bondage of Egypt, which had conducted them through the sea and led them across “the great and terrible wilderness.” This made victory sure. No enemy could possibly stand before Jehovah acting in unqualified grace on behalf of His people.

Let my reader note carefully that there is not a single condition proposed by the priest in the above quotation. He states in the most absolute way, the relationship and consequent privilege of the Israel of God. He does not say, “The Lord thy God will be with you, *if* you do so and so.” This would not be the proper language of one who stood before the people of God as the exponent of those privileges which grace had conferred upon them. Grace proposes no conditions, raises no barriers, makes no stipulations. Its language is, “The Lord thy God is with thee... He goeth with you... to fight for you... to save you.” When Jehovah fights for His people they are sure of victory. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Grant me but this, that God is with me, and I argue full victory over every spiritual foe.

Thus much as to the question of privilege. Let us now turn to the question of responsibility.

“And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house and hath not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard and hath not yet eaten of it? Let him also go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her. And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and

fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.”

There is uncommon moral beauty in the order in which the priest and the officer are introduced in this passage. The former is the exponent of Israel's privileges; the latter, of Israel's responsibilities. How interesting it is to see that, before the officers were permitted to address the assembly on the question of responsibility, the priest had established them in the knowledge of their precious privilege. Imagine the case reversed. Suppose the officer's voice had first been heard. What would have been the result? Fear, depression and discouragement! To press responsibility before I know my position — to call for affections before I am in the relationship — is to place an intolerable yoke upon the neck, an insufferable burden upon the shoulder. This is not God's way. If you search from Genesis to Revelation, you will find, without so much as a single exception, that the divine order is privilege and then responsibility. Set me upon the rock of privilege and I am in a position to understand and fulfill my responsibility, but talk to me of responsibility while yet in the pit of ruin, the mire of legality or the ditch of despondency, and you rob me of all hope of ever rising into that hallowed sphere upon which the sunlight of divine favor pours itself in living luster, and where alone responsibilities can be discharged to the glory of the name of Jesus.

Some talk to us of “gospel conditions.” Whoever heard of a gospel fenced with conditions? We can understand law-conditions, but a gospel with conditions is “a different gospel” (Gal. 1: 6-7). Conditions to be fulfilled by the creature pertain not to the gospel, but to the law. Man has been tried under all possible conditions. And what has been the result? Failure! Yes, failure only, failure continually. Man is a ruin, a wreck, bankrupt. Of what use can it ever be to place such an one under conditions, even though you call them “gospel conditions?” None whatever!

Man, under any kind of conditions, can only prove unfaithful. He has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. He has been condemned, root and branch. “They that are in the flesh cannot please God.” It does not say, “they who are in the *body*.” No, but “they that are in the *flesh*.” The believer is not in the flesh, though in

the body. He is not looked at in his old creation standing, in his old Adamic condition in which he has been tried and condemned. Christ has come down and died under the full weight of his guilt. He has taken the sinner's place with all its liabilities, and by His death settled everything. He lay in the grave after having answered every claim and silenced every enemy — justice, law, sin, death, wrath, judgment, Satan, everything and everyone. There lay the divine Surety in the silent tomb, and God entered the scene, raised Him from the dead, set Him at His own right hand in the heavens, sent down the Holy Spirit to testify to a risen and exalted Savior, and to unite to Him, as thus risen and exalted, all who believe in His name.

Here, then, we get onto new ground altogether. We can now listen to the officer as he tells out in our hearing the claims of Christ upon all those who are united to Him. The priest has spoken to us and told us of the imperishable ground which we occupy, the indestructible relationship in which we stand, and now we are in a position to listen to the one who stands before us as the exponent of our high and holy responsibilities. Had “the officer” come first, we should have fled from his presence, discouraged and dismayed by the weight and solemnity of his words, and giving utterance to the despairing inquiry, “Who then can be saved?” But, inasmuch as “the priest” — the minister of grace, the exponent of privilege — has set us upon our feet in the new creation and strengthened our hearts by unfolding the unconditional grace in which we stand, we can listen to the “commandments” of the officer and find them “not grievous,” because they come to us from off the mercy-seat.

And what does the officer say to us? Just this: “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life.” This is the sum and substance of the officer's message. He demands on the part of God's warriors, a disentangled heart. It is not a question of salvation, of being a child of God, of being a true Israelite. It is simply a question of ability to wage an effective warfare, and clearly, a man cannot fight well if his heart is entangled with “a house,” “a vineyard” or “a wife.”

It was not a question of *having* such things. By no means. Thousands of those who went forth to tread the battlefield and gather the spoils of victory, had houses and lands and domestic ties.

The officers had no quarrel with the possessors of these things. The only point was, not to be *entangled* with them. The apostle does not say, “No man that warreth engages in the affairs of this life.” Had he said this, we should all have to live in idleness and isolation, whereas he distinctly teaches us, elsewhere, that, “If any man will not work, neither shall he eat.” The grand point is to keep the heart disentangled. God's warriors must have free hearts, and the only way to be free is to cast all our care upon Him who cares for us. I can stand in the battlefield with a free heart when I have placed my house, my vineyard and my wife in the divine keeping.

Further, God's warriors must have courageous hearts as well as free hearts. “The fearful and the faint-hearted” can never stand in the battle or wear the laurel of victory. Our hearts must be disentangled from the world and be bold by reason of our absolute confidence in God. Be it well remembered that these things are not “gospel conditions,” but gospel results — a deeply-important distinction. What a mistake to speak of gospel conditions! It is simply the old leaven of legality presented in a new and strange form, and dubbed with a name which is a contradiction. If those precious clusters which are the result of union with the Living Vine, be set forth as the necessary conditions of that union, what must become of the sinner? Where shall we get them if not in Christ? And how do we become united to Christ? Is it by conditions? No, but by faith.

May the Holy Spirit instruct my reader as to the divine order of “privilege and responsibility!”

Deut. 21:18-21, Luke 15:11-32

Law and grace Exemplified.

In looking through the various laws and ordinances of the Old Testament, we cannot fail to observe the intense spirit of holiness which they breathe; the most trifling ordinance, apparently, was calculated to impress Israel with a sense of holiness. God's presence in their midst was ever to be the spring of holiness and separation to His people. Hence we read, in this passage of the book of Deuteronomy, "So shalt thou put away evil from among you." And again, in the ordinance of the manslayer, we read, "Defile not, therefore, the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel." (Num. 35: 34.) *God's dwelling place must be holy*; and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." There can be no alteration in this. Dispensations may change, but God, blessed be His name, can never cease to be "the holy, holy, holy Lord God of Israel;" nor can He ever cease in His effort to make His people like what He is Himself. Whether He speak from amid the thunders of Mount Sinai, or in all the gentleness and grace of the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat in the heavens, His object is still the same, — viz., to make and keep His people holy.

Very different, however, is the mode of acting in the law, from that which we find in the gospel. In the law, God was calling upon man to be what He desired him to be; He set before him a high and holy standard, no doubt, but yet a standard to which man could not attain. Even though he might aspire most ardently after what the law set before him, yet, from the very fact of what he was, he could not attain to it. All his efforts were based upon the unholiness of a nature which was perfectly irrecoverable. The law was like a mirror, let down from heaven, to show to all who would only look honestly into it, that they were, both negatively and positively, the very thing which the law condemned and set aside. The law said, "Do this," and "Thou shalt not do that," and man's only response, uttered from the very depth of his nature, was, "Oh wretched man that I am!" In short, the law, like a plumb-line, measured the human character, and showed out all its crookedness and imperfection. It was not, by any

means, its province to make the sinner better. No; its province was to reveal his sins, and put him under the curse. "The law entered, that the offence might abound." And again, "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." This is very plain. Have anything to do with law, and it will prove you to be a poor helpless sinner, and put you under the curse. It can really do nothing else, so long as God and man, holiness and sin, continue to be what they are. We may seek to confound law and grace, in our ignorance of the true genius of each; but it will prove, in the end, to be most thoroughly vain. As well might we seek to cause light and darkness to mingle, as to make law and grace combine. No; they are as distinct as any two things can be. The law can only point out to man the error of his ways - the evil of his nature. It does not make him straight, but only tells him he is crooked; it does not make him clean, but only tells him he is defiled. Nor was the law designed, as is often imagined, to lead sinners to Christ. This idea is founded upon an erroneous quotation of Galatians 3: 24. It is not said, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ," but "the law was our schoolmaster unto (or until) Christ." The words, "to bring us" are in italics, and do not appear in the original. This is important, as helping my reader to understand the nature, object, and scope of the law. How could the law bring a man to Christ? All it did for him was to shut him up under the curse; his finding his way to Christ was the result of quite another ministry altogether. The law acted the part of a schoolmaster from the time it was given until Christ came, by keeping souls under a restraint from which nothing could deliver, save the spirit of liberty imparted through the gospel of Christ.

However, by a simple comparison of the two Scriptures which stand at the head of this paper, we shall have a very striking proof of the difference between the law and the gospel. The case presented in each, is that of a son who was disposed to do his own will and enjoy his own way. This is no uncommon case, The prodigal desired to have his portion, and to be away from under the eye of his father. But, ah I how soon he was called to learn his folly! "When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want." Just so; how else could it be? He had left the only place in which all his need could be supplied, even the father's house. He had made his portion and the father's to be separate things, and

hence he was compelled to learn that the former was capable of being exhausted. We can get to the bottom of all human circumstances and resources. There never was a cup of human or earthly happiness — be it ever so deep — ever so abundant in desirable ingredients — which could not be drained to the bottom. There never was a well of human, or earthly refreshment, of which it could not be said, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Not so, however, with the cup which redeeming love puts into our hand — not so with the wells of salvation from which the Gospel invites us to draw. These are exhaustless, eternal, divine. As the countless ages of eternity roll along, God's cup shall be full, and his wells shall send forth their streams in immortal freshness and purity. My reader, how sweet — how ineffably sweet — to partake of these!

But the prodigal "began to be in want." And what then? Did he think of the father? No. So long as he had any other resource, he would not think of returning home. "He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." This was terrible. Thus does Satan crush the spirits of his votaries. Every one who is not walking in communion with God and subjection to the Gospel of Christ, is thus engaged in the service of Satan. There is no middle ground. Reader, who are you serving? Are you serving Christ or Satan? If the latter, oh *remember the end*. Remember, too, the Father's love — the Father's house. Remember that "God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his evil ways and live." This you may learn from the prodigal. The moment his necessities led him to think of returning home, that home was open wide to receive him. And, observe, it was simply *his need* that caused him to say, "I will arise and go to my father." It was not any longing desire for the father's company, but merely for the father's bread. Many are vainly looking within for some rising emotions of affectionate desire after God, not knowing that our very necessities — our very miseries — our very sins render us suited objects for the exercise of Divine grace. Grace suits *the miserable*, because the miserable can magnify grace.

And here we have arrived at a point, at which we may appreciate the contrast between our Scriptures. How would the law

have dealt with our prodigal? The answer is simple. "Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place. And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of the city shall stone him with stones, that he die; so shalt thou put away evil from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear." The law could speak of nought but judgment and death. Mercy was not within its range, nor at all in accordance with its spirit. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," was its stern language. And again, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

But how does grace deal with its object? Oh, for hearts to adore our God, who is the fountain of grace!

"But 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." In short, the mode of treatment is the very opposite. The law said, "Lay hold on him" — the Gospel said, "Embrace him;" the law said, "Stone him" — the Gospel said, "Kiss him;" and yet, be it remembered, we meet the same God in both. The God of Israel speaks both in Deuteronomy and in Luke; and, moreover, we must remember what has already been stated, viz., that we trace the same object in both, which is, to give full deliverance from the power of evil. The stone of judgment and the embrace of love were both designed to put away evil; but, ah! how much more fully was the latter in sympathy with the Divine mind, than the former! Judgment is truly God's strange work. It was far more congenial to Him to be on the neck of the poor returning prodigal than to be within the enclosure of Mount Sinai. True, the prodigal had nothing to commend him — he had proved himself to be all that the law condemned, — he had been "a glutton and a drunkard" — the rags of the far country were upon him, and, were the law but to take its course, instead of the affectionate embrace of love, he would have to meet the stern grasp of justice; and instead of the father's kiss, he would have had to meet the stone of judgment from the men of his city, in the presence of the elders. Hence we see the contrast between law and grace — it is most striking.

But here, let us ask, how could all this be? How can we reconcile the marvellous difference in the principles of acting here set before us? Whither must we turn for a solution of this apparent contradiction? How can God embrace a poor sinner? How can He shield such from the full action of justice and the law? In other words, how can He be "just and the justifier?" How can He pardon the sinner steeped to the lips in iniquity, and yet not "clear the guilty?" How can He, who "cannot look upon sin," but with abhorrence, and "in whose sight the heavens are not clean," sit down at the table with a poor wretched prodigal? Where, my reader, shall we find an answer to these questions? In *the cross of Calvary*. Yes: there we have a precious — a divine reply to all. The Man nailed to the tree settles everything. Jesus bore sin's tremendous curse upon the cross — He exposed His own bosom to the stroke of justice — He drained to the dregs the cup of Jehovah's righteous wrath — "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree" — "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Was not this a vindication of the law? Did ever the words, "So shalt thou put evil away," fall with such impressive solemnity upon the ear, as when the blessed Son of God cried out, from amid the horrors of Golgotha, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Oh! never, never. All the stones that were ever cast at offending sinners — all the penalties that were ever inflicted - yea, we shall proceed further, and say, that the eternal punishment of the wicked in the lake of fire, could not afford such a solemn proof of God's hatred of sin, as the scene on the cross. There it was that men and angels might behold God's thoughts of sin, and God's thoughts of sinners. His hatred of the former, and His love for the latter. The very same act which shows out the condemnation of sin, shows out the salvation of the sinner. Hence the Cross, while it most fully vindicates the holiness and justice of God, opens up a channel through which the copious streams of redeeming love can flow down to the guilty sinner. "Mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace kissed each other," when the Son of God offered up Himself as a sacrifice for sin.

And, if it be asked, What proof have we of this? What solid ground of assurance have we of the full forgiveness and perfect acceptance of the believer? The answer is, *Resurrection*. Jesus is

now at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens; and there, moreover, on behalf of the believer. "He was delivered for our offences," and, could we go no further than this, we might despair; but it is added, "He was raised again for our justification." Here we have full peace — full emancipation — full victory. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He declared Himself as "the God of peace." Justice was satisfied, and the sinner's Surety was set down at God's right hand; and all who, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, believe in His death and resurrection, are looked at in Him, and seen to be as free from every charge of sin as He is. Most marvellous grace! Who could have conceived such a thing? Who could have thought that He, who is "the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person," should come down and put Himself in the sinner's place, and bear all the wrath, curse, and judgment due to sin, in order that the sinner might be set down in the very presence of the holiness of God, without "spot or wrinkle or any such thing," so that God might be able to say of him, "Thou art all fair; there is no spot in thee?" My reader, was ever love like this? Truly, we have here, love in its fountain — love in its channel - and love in its application. The Father is the eternal fountain, the Son is the channel, and the Holy Ghost is the power of application. What divine completeness! What perfect peace! What a solid resting-place for the sinner! Who can raise a question? God has received His prodigal — has clothed and adorned him — killed the fatted calf for him — and, above all, has given utterance to the words, "*It is meet that we should make merry and be glad*" — words which ought to dispel every shadow of fear and doubt from the heart. If God can say, in virtue of the finished work of Christ, "It is meet," who can say it is not meet? Satan may accuse, but God's reply is, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" In short, the soul that believes in Jesus is lifted into a perfectly cloudless region, where, it may be truly said, "there is neither enemy, nor evil occurrent;" and in that region we can see no one so exquisitely happy in the divine results of redemption as the blessed God Himself. If the prodigal could possibly have retained a feeling of doubt or reserve, what could have so effectually banished it as the father's joy in getting him back again? Neither doubt nor fear can live in the light of our Father's countenance. If we believe that God rejoices in receiving back a sinner, we cannot harbour suspicion or hesitancy. It is not merely

that God *can* receive us, but it is His joy to do so. Hence we not only know that "grace *reigns* through righteousness," but that all heaven rejoices in one repenting sinner. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift?

And now, one word, in conclusion, as to the way in which God secures holiness through grace. Is sin made light of? Is it tolerated? Does the blessed God, when He receives a returning prodigal to His bosom, in sovereign grace, without one upbraiding look or expression, lead us to suppose that sin has become a whit less odious or abominable? By no means. We have already seen how the Cross has added force and solemnity to every one of the divine statutes against sin. God has proved, by the bruising of His beloved Son, that His hatred of sin was only to be equalled by His love for the sinner. *A crucified Christ*, declares God's hatred of sin; *a risen Christ*, declares the triumph of His love for the sinner. The death of Christ vindicates the law; His resurrection emancipates the soul of the believer, while both these together, form the basis of all practical holiness, as we learn in Romans 6. "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" "We are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life." "That the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer serve sin." When the father received the prodigal, he did so in a way altogether worthy of himself, and of the honour of his house. He could not receive him otherwise. He could not allow him to continue in the rags of the far country, nor in the habits thereof either. The husks and the rioting had all to be laid aside. His dress and habits were now to correspond with his new position. *Fellowship with the father* henceforth became his grand characteristic. He was not put under a dry code of rules as a servant, as he himself had sought to be. No; the manner of his reception, the principle on which he was to be dealt with, and the position to be assigned to him, were all in his father's power, and, being in his power, we can easily see what his *will* was. He should either be received with a kiss or not at all; he should either be seated at the table, or not enter the house at all; he should either get the place of a son or nothing. In short, it was the father's grace that arranged all for the prodigal, and happy was it for him to have it so.

But, oh! how could the prodigal think lightly of sin in the light of such extraordinary grace? Impossible. He was most effectually delivered from the power of sin by the grace which reigned in his reception, and in his position. It was truly such as to set sin before him in the most fearful colours. "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." Yes, God forbid. It cannot, it must not be, my reader. Grace has set us free — free not only from the penalty of sin, but free from its power — free from its present dominion. Blessed freedom! The law gave sin power over the sinner; grace gives him power over it. The law revealed to the sinner his weakness; grace makes him acquainted with the strength of Christ, the law put the sinner under the curse, no matter who or what he was; grace introduces him into all the ineffable blessedness of the Father's house — the Father's bosom. The law elicited only the cry, "O, wretched man that I am!" grace enables him to sing triumphantly, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory." These are important differences, and such as may well lead us into deep thankfulness for the truth that "we are not under the law, but under grace."

If anything were needed to prove that nothing but grace can form the basis of holy service, the spirit and bearing of the elder brother in our beautiful parable would most fully prove it. He thought he had ever been a very faithful servant, and his heart rebelled against the high position assigned to his younger brother. But, alas! he understood not the father's heart. It was not the cold service of formalism or legalism that was needed, but the service of love — the service of one who felt he had been forgiven much — or rather those deep affections which flow from the sense of redeeming love. All practical Christianity is comprehended in that word of the apostle, viz., "We love Him because He first loved us." God grant that we may all enter more into the sacred power of these simple, but most precious truths!

Joshua 1: 9

STABILITY AND PEACE

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee wheresoever thou goest.”

Here lies the true secret of stability and peace at all times and under all circumstances. The authority of God for the ground we occupy, and His presence with us thereon — the Word of the Lord as the warrant for what we are doing, and the light of His countenance in the doing of it. There is no possibility of getting on without these two things. It will not do merely to be able to give chapter and verse for a certain position which we have taken up; we must realize the Lord's own presence with us. And it will not do to say we have the Lord's presence with us, unless we can give a divine warrant, a “Thus saith the Lord” for what we are doing and for the path we are treading.

Joshua could never have faced the difficulties of his day without these two things. And although we may not have to meet the same things that lay in his path, yet we may rest assured of this, we shall never get on in these days without the Word of God as our authority and His presence as our strength. Our lot is cast in a time of special confusion. A multitude of conflicting voices fall on the ear. Men are taking sides. We see apparently the best and holiest, the most devoted and intelligent men ranged on opposite sides of the same question and pursuing opposite ways, though professing to follow the same Lord. What are we to think? What are we to do? What do we want? We want to hear, deep down in our very inmost soul, these two weighty and imperishable sentences, “Have not I commanded thee?” — “Lo, I am with thee.” These are grand realities which the feeblest and most unlettered saint may enjoy, and without which none can possibly make headway against the tide of evil at present rising around us.

Never, perhaps, in the annals of Christianity was there a moment which more imperatively demanded the most direct

personal dealing of the soul with God and His truth. It will not do for anyone to pin his faith to the sleeve of another. God is testing souls in a very remarkable manner. The sieve is doing its solemn work in the midst of the Church. Those who are enabled to go through the sifting and testing with God will reap a rich harvest of blessing, *but we must go through it*. It is being made manifest just now in a very special way, whose faith is standing merely in the wisdom of men and whose in the power of God. All that is hollow is being exposed and will be so more and more, but God will keep those whose hearts are true to the name of Jesus. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.”

This is the soul's unfailing refuge at all times. It was to this the apostle Paul directed the elders of Ephesus at the close of his touching and pathetic address in Acts 20. “And now, brethren, I commend you to *God* and to the *Word* of His grace.” He does not commend them to any order of men, not even to apostles or their successors, or to general councils or their decrees, or to fathers or their traditions, or to doctors or their dogmas. No, none of these would avail in the presence of the “grievous wolves” which were about to enter in among them, and amid the “perverse things” which some from among themselves would give utterance to. Nothing but God Himself and the Word of His grace could stand in an evil day, or enable a soul to stand.

There is something beautiful in the jealous care of the apostle Paul lest any should lean upon him or upon anything except the living God Himself. Hearken to the following glowing passage, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess. 2: 13). That devoted, single-hearted workman only sought to connect souls with God by means of His Word. This is the object of all true ministry. Where the ministry is not true, not of God, it will connect souls with itself; and in that case human influence will be brought to bear — weight of character, education, mental power, wealth, position, a thousand things which are all used to form a foundation for the

soul's confidence and shut it out from God. Thus the faith of the soul is made to rest in the wisdom of men and not in the power of God.

Christian reader, we want you to ponder this matter deeply. Be assured it demands your serious attention. See that your soul is resting on the deep and solid foundation of God's Word — that you have His direct and positive authority for where you are and what you are doing. And then see also that you have His presence with you. These two things will impart sweet peace to your spirit and holy stability to your path, come what may. “Have not I commanded thee?” — “Lo, I am with thee.” It is your happy privilege to know the reality of these things, just as fully and just as distinctly in your day as did Joshua in his day, Jeremiah in his day, and the apostles in their day. The measure of apprehension may vary — the circumstances may differ — but the ground of principle is the same always.

Do not, therefore, we entreat you, be satisfied with anything less than God's authority and God's presence. Be not troubled or perplexed about the conflicting opinions of men. You must expect these. They are nothing new. But remember that, far above all the din and confusion, the strife and controversy, the opposition of sects and parties — far above all these things, in the clear light of the divine presence, in the calmness of the inner sanctuary, faith can hear with distinctness those precious, soul-sustaining words, “Have not I commanded thee?”, ”Lo, I am with thee.”

These things can never fail: they are imperishable. See that you possess them just now. Be able, in the calm dignity of a faith that rests only in the power and on the authority of God, to give a reason for the path you tread, the work you do, the niche you fill. This is not highmindedness or haughtiness, dogmatism or pride, self-confidence or vainglory. It is the very reverse. It is self-denial and confidence in God. “With the lowly is wisdom.” Precious truth! May we all remember it! It is the lowly mind that really possesses heavenly wisdom. It is not the learned, the astute, the intelligent or clear-headed among men who can thread their way through the labyrinths of the present moment. No, it is the lowly, the simple, the self-distrusting, the childlike, the unpretending. These are they who will have wisdom to guide them in darkest times. These are they

who will possess peace in their souls and stability in their ways.
May God's Spirit lead us into these things!

Joshua 5.

"Gilgal."

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Rom. 15:4) These few words furnish a title, distinct and unquestionable, for the Christian to range through the wide and magnificent field of Old Testament scripture, and gather therein instruction and comfort, according to the measure of his capacity, and the character or depth of his spiritual need. And, were any further warrant needed, we have it with equal clearness in the words of another inspired epistle: "Now all these things happened unto them (Israel) for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Corinthians 10:11.

No doubt, in reading the Old Testament, as in reading the New, there is constant need of watchfulness; need of self-emptiness, of dependence upon the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit, by whom all scripture has been indited. The imagination must be checked, lest it lead us into crude notions and fanciful interpretations, which tend to no profit, but rather to the weakening of the power of scripture over the soul, and hindering our growth in the divine life.

Still, we must never lose sight of the divine charter made out for us, in Romans 15:4 — never forget for a single moment, that "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." It is in the strength of these words that we invite the reader to accompany us back to the opening of the Book of Joshua, that we may together contemplate the striking and instructive scenes presented there, and seek to gather up some of the precious "learning" there unfolded. If we mistake not, we shall learn some fine lessons on the banks of the Jordan, and find the air of Gilgal most healthful and bracing for the spiritual constitution.

We have all been accustomed to look at Jordan as the figure of death — the death of the believer — his leaving this world, and

going to heaven. Doubtless, the reader has often read and heard these lines —

"Could we but stand where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, or death's cold flood,
Could fright us from the shore."

But all this line of thought, feeling, and experience, is very far below the mark of true Christianity. A moment's reflection, in the true light which scripture pours upon our souls, would be sufficient to show how utterly deficient is the popular religious thought as to Jordan. For instance, when a believer dies and goes to heaven, is he called to fight? Surely not. All is rest and peace up yonder — ineffable, eternal peace. Not a ripple on that ocean. No sound of alarm throughout that pure and holy region. No conflict there. No need of armour. We shall want no girdle, because our garments may flow loosely around us. We shall not need a breastplate of righteousness, for divine righteousness shall there have its eternal abode. We shall have no want of sandals, for there will be no rough or thorny places in that fair and blissful region. No shield called for there, inasmuch as there will be no fiery darts flying; no helmet of salvation, for the divine and eternal results of God's salvation shall then be reached. No sword, inasmuch as there will be neither enemy nor evil occurrent throughout all that blissful, sunny region.

Hence, therefore, Jordan cannot mean the death of the believer and his going to heaven, for the simplest of all reasons that it was when Israel crossed the Jordan that their fighting, properly speaking, began. True they had fought with Amalek in the wilderness; but it was in Canaan that their real war commenced. A child can understand this.

But does not Jordan represent death? Most surely it does. And may not the believer have to cross it? True; but if he has, he finds it dry, because the Prince of Life has gone down into its deepest

depths, and opened up a pathway for His people by the which they pass over into their eternal inheritance.

There is no such idea in the word of God — in the gospel of Christ, or in the entire range of our heavenly Christianity — as a Christian standing where Moses stood, when, from Pisgah's top, he looked forth over the promised land. Moses, in the governmental dealings of God, was prevented going over Jordan. And, looking at Moses officially, we know that the law could not possibly bring the people into Canaan.

But Christ, the true Joshua, has crossed the Jordan, and not only crossed it, but turned it into a pathway by which the ransomed host can pass over dryshod into the heavenly Canaan. The Christian is not called to stand shivering on the brink of the river of death, as one in doubt as to how it may go with him. That river is dried up for faith. Its power is gone. Our adorable Lord "has abolished death, and brought life and incorruptibility to light by the gospel."

Glorious, enfranchising fact! Let us praise Him for it. Let all our ransomed powers adore Him. Let our whole moral being be stirred up to chant the praises of Him who has taken the sting from death, and destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and conducted us into a sphere which is pervaded throughout with life, light, incorruptibility, and glory. May our entire practical career be to His glory!

We shall now proceed to examine, more particularly, the teaching of scripture on this great subject, and may the Holy Spirit Himself be our immediate instructor!

"And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there, before they passed over. And it came to pass, after three days, that the officers went through the host; and they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. *Yet there shall be a space between you and it*, about two thousand cubits by measure;

come not near unto it, *that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore.*" Joshua 3:1-4.

There are three deeply important points in Israel's history, which the reader would do well to ponder. There is, first, the blood-stained lintel, in the land of Egypt; secondly, the Red Sea; thirdly, the river Jordan.

Now, in each of these we have a type of the death of Christ, in some one or other of its grand aspects — for, as we know, that precious death has many and various aspects, and nothing can be more profitable for the Christian, and nothing, surely, ought to be more attractive, than the study of the profound mystery of the death of Christ. There are depths and heights in that mystery which eternity alone will unfold; and it should be our delight, now, under the powerful ministry of the Holy Ghost, and in the perfect light of holy scripture, to search into these things for the strength, comfort, and refreshment of the inward man.

Looking, then, at the death of Christ, as typified by the blood of the paschal lamb, we see in it that which screens us from the judgement of God. "I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgement; I am the Lord. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt." Exodus 12.

Now, we need hardly say, it is of the deepest moment for the exercised, consciously guilty, soul, to know that God has provided a shelter from wrath and judgement to come. No rightly instructed person would think, for a moment, of undervaluing such an aspect of the death of Christ. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Israel's safety rested upon God's estimate of the blood. He does not say, "When you see the blood." The Judge saw the blood — knew its value, and passed over the house. Israel was screened by the blood of the lamb — by God's estimate of that blood, not by their own. Precious fact!

How prone we are to be occupied with our thoughts about the blood of Christ, instead of with God's thoughts! We feel we do not value that precious blood as we ought — who ever did or ever could? and then we begin to question if we are safe, seeing we so sadly fail in our estimate of Christ's work, and in our love to His Person.

Now, if our safety depends, in the smallest degree, upon our estimate of Christ's work, or our love to His Person, we are in more imminent danger than if it depended upon our keeping the law. True it is — most true — who could think of denying it? — we ought to value Christ's work, and we ought to love Himself. But if all this be put upon the footing of a righteous claim, and if our safety rests upon our answering to that claim, then are we in greater danger, and more justly condemned than if we stood on the ground of a broken law. for, just in proportion as the claims of Christ are higher than the claims of Moses, and in proportion as Christianity is higher than the legal system, so are we worse off, in greater danger, further from peace, if our safety depends upon our response to those higher claims.

Mark, it is not that we ought not to answer to such claims; we most certainly ought. But we have not; and hence, so far as we are concerned, our ruin and guilt are only made more manifest, and our condemnation more righteous, if we stand upon the claims of Christ, because we have not answered to them. If we are to be saved by our estimate of Christ, by our response to His claims, by our appreciation of His love, we are worse off by far than if we were placed under the claims of the law of Moses.

But, blessed be God, it is not so. We are saved by grace — free, sovereign, divine, and eternal grace — not by our sense of grace. We are sheltered by the blood, not by our estimate of the blood. Jehovah did not say, on that awful night, “When *you* see the blood, and estimate it as you ought, I will pass over you.” Nothing of the kind. This is not the way of our God. He wanted to shelter His people, and to let them know that they were sheltered — perfectly, because divinely sheltered — and therefore He places the matter wholly upon a divine basis; He takes it entirely out of their hands, by assuring them that their safety rested, simply and entirely, upon

the blood, and upon His estimate thereof. He gives them to understand that they had nothing whatever to do with providing the shelter. It was His to *provide*. It was theirs to *enjoy*.

Thus it stood between Jehovah and His Israel, in that memorable night; and thus it stands between Him and the soul that simply trusts in Jesus now. We are not saved by *our* love, or *our* estimate, or *our* anything. We are saved by the blood, and by God's estimate of it. And just as Israel, within that bloodstained lintel, screened from judgement — safe from the sword of the destroyer — could feed upon the roasted lamb, so may the believer, perfectly sheltered from the wrath to come — sweetly secure from all danger — screened from judgement, feed upon Christ in all the preciousness of what He is.

But more of this by-and-by.

We are specially anxious that the reader should weigh the point on which we have been dwelling, if he be one who has not yet found peace, even as to the question of safety from judgement to come, which, as we shall see (if God permit) ere we close this paper, is but a small part, though an ineffably precious part, of what the death of Christ has procured for us. We have very little idea indeed of how much of the leaven of self-righteousness cleaves to us, even after our conversion, and how immensely it interferes with our peace, and our enjoyment of grace. It may be we fancy we have got done with self-righteousness when we have given up all thoughts of being saved by our works; but, alas! it is not so, for the evil takes a thousand shapes, and of all these, none is more subtle than that at which we have glanced, namely, the feeling that we do not value the blood as we ought, and the doubting our safety on that ground. All this is the fruit of self-righteousness. We have not got done with *self*. True, we are not, it may be, making a saviour of our *doings*, but we are of our *feelings*. We are seeking, unknown to ourselves perhaps, to find some sort of title in our love to God, or our appreciation of Christ.

Now, all this must be given up. We must rest simply on the blood of Christ, and upon God's testimony to that blood. He sees the blood. He values it as it deserves. He is satisfied. This ought to

satisfy us. He did not say to Israel, When I see how you be have yourselves; when I see the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the girded loins, the shod feet, I will pass over you.

No doubt all these things had their proper place; but that proper place was not as the ground of safety, but as the secret of communion. They were called to behave themselves — called to keep the feast; but it was as *being*, not *in order to be*, a sheltered people. This made all the difference. It was because they were divinely screened from judgement that they could keep the feast. They had the authority of the word of God to assure them that there was no judgement for them; and if they believed that word they could celebrate the feast in peace and safety. "Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." Heb. 11:28.

Here lies the deep and precious secret of the whole matter. It was by faith he kept the Passover. God had said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you," and He could not deny Himself. It would have been a denial of His very nature and character, and an ignoring of His own blessed remedy, had a single hair of an Israelite's head been touched, on that deeply solemn night. It was not, we repeat, in anywise a question of Israel's state or Israel's deservings. It was simply and entirely a question of the value of the blood in *God's sight*, and of the truth and authority of His own word.

What stability is here! What peace and rest! What a solid ground of confidence! The blood of Christ, and the word of God! True — divinely true; — let it never be forgotten or lost sight of; it is only by the grace of the Holy Spirit that the word of God can be received, or the blood of Christ relied upon. Still, it is the word of God and the blood of Christ, and nothing else, which give peace to the heart, as regards all question of coming judgement. There can be no judgement for the believer. And why? Because the blood is on the mercy-seat, as the perfect proof that judgement has been already executed.

"He bore on the tree the sentence for me,

And now both the Surety and sinner are free."

Yes, all praise to His name, thus it stands as to every soul that simply takes God at His word, and rests in the precious blood of Christ. It is as impossible that such an one can come into judgement, as that Christ Himself can. All who are sheltered by the blood are as safe as God can make them — as safe as Christ Himself. It seems perfectly wonderful, for any poor sinful mortal to be able to pen such words; but the blessed fact is, it is either this or nothing. If there is any question as to the believer's safety, then the blood of Christ is not on the mercy-seat, or it is of no account in the judgement of God. If it be a question of the believer's state, of his worthiness, of his feelings, of his experience, of his walk, of his love, of his devotedness, of his appreciation of Christ, then would there be no force, no value, no truth in that glorious sentence, "When I see the blood, I will pass over;" for, in that case, the form of speech should be entirely changed, and a dark and chilling shade be cast over its heavenly lustre. It should then be, "When I see the blood, and"

But no, beloved anxious reader, it is not, and it never can be, thus. Nothing must ever be added — not the weight of a feather, the breadth of a hair, or the movement of an eyelash — to that precious blood which has perfectly satisfied God as a Judge, and which perfectly shelters every soul that simply believes what God says because He says it. If the righteous Judge has declared Himself satisfied, surely the guilty culprit may well be satisfied also. God is satisfied with the blood of Jesus; and when the soul is satisfied likewise, all is settled, and there is peace, as regards the question of judgement. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." How can there be, seeing He has borne the condemnation in their stead? To doubt the believer's exemption from judgement is to make God a liar, and to make the blood of Christ of none effect.

The reader will note that, thus far, we have been occupied only with the question of deliverance from judgement — a most weighty question surely. But, as we shall see in the course of this series of papers, there is far more secured for us by the death of Christ than freedom from judgement and wrath, blessed as that is. That peerless sacrifice does a great deal more for us than keep God out as a Judge.

But, for the present, we pause, and shall close this paper with a solemn and earnest question to the reader — *Art thou sheltered by the blood of Jesus?* Do not rest, beloved, until you can answer with a clear and unhesitating “Yes.” Remember, you are either sheltered by the blood, or exposed to the horrors of eternal judgement.

PART 2.

In our last paper we had before us Israel under the shelter of the blood. A grand reality, most surely; who could duly estimate it? What human language could suitably unfold the deep blessedness of being screened from the judgement of God by the blood of the Lamb — of being within that hallowed circle where wrath and judgement can never come? Who can speak aright of the privilege of feeding, in perfect safety, on the Lamb, whose precious blood has for ever averted from us the wrath of a sin-hating God?

But, blessed as all this is, there is much more than this. There is far more comprehended in the salvation of God than deliverance from judgement and wrath. We may have the fullest assurance that our sins are forgiven, that God will never enter into judgement with us on account of our sins; and yet be very far indeed from the enjoyment of the true Christian position. We may be filled with all manner of fears about ourselves — fears occasioned by the consciousness of indwelling sin — the power of Satan — the influence of the world. All these things may crop up before us, and fill us with the gravest apprehensions.

Thus, for example, when we turn to Exodus 14, we find Israel in the deepest distress, and almost overwhelmed with fear. It would seem as if they had, for the moment, lost sight of the fact that they had been under the cover of the blood.

Let us look at the passage.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them

in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them: and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. And they did so. And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, *that we have let Israel go from serving us?*" — mark these words: — "And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him. And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with a high hand. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them, encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were *sore afraid*: and the children of Israel *cried out* unto the Lord."

Now, we may feel disposed to ask, "Are these the people whom we have seen so recently feeding, in perfect Safety, under the cover of the blood?" The very same. Whence, then, these fears, this intense alarm, this agonising cry? Did they really think that Jehovah was going to judge and destroy them, after all? Not exactly. Of what, then, were they afraid? Of perishing in the wilderness after all. "And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness."

All this was most gloomy and depressing. Their poor hearts seem to fluctuate between "graves in Egypt" and death in the wilderness. There is no sense of deliverance; no adequate knowledge either of God's purposes or of God's salvation. all seems utter darkness, almost bordering upon hopeless despair. They are thoroughly hemmed in and "shut up." They seem in a worse plight than ever. They heartily wish themselves back again amid the brick-

kilns and stubble fields of Egypt. The mountains on either side of them; the sea in front; Pharaoh and all his terrific hosts behind.

The case seemed perfectly hopeless; and hopeless it was, so far as they were concerned. They were utterly powerless, and they were being made to realize it, and this is a very painful process to go through; but very wholesome and valuable, yea, most necessary for all. We must all, in one way or another, learn the force, meaning, and depth of that phrase, "without strength"! It is exactly in proportion as we find out what it is to be without strength, that we are prepared to appreciate God's "due time."

But, we may here inquire, "is there aught in the history of God's people now answering to Israel's experience at the Red Sea?" Doubtless there is; for we are told that the things which happened unto Israel are our ensamples, or types. And, most surely, the scene at the Red Sea is full of instruction for us. How often do we find the children of God plunged in the very depths of distress and darkness as to their state and prospects! It is not that they question the love of God, or the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, nor yet that God will reckon their sins to them, or enter into judgement with them. But still, they have no sense of full deliverance. They do not see the application of the *death* of Christ to their evil nature. They do not realize the glorious truth that by that death they are completely delivered from this present evil world, from the dominion of sin, and from the power of Satan. They, to a certain extent, see that the blood of Jesus screens them from the judgement of God; but there is no bright, happy, emancipating sense of full and everlasting salvation. They are, to speak according to our type, at Egypt's side of the Red Sea, and in danger of falling into the hands of the prince of this world. They do not see "*all* their enemies dead on the seashore." They cannot sing the song of redemption. No one can sing it, until he stands by faith on the wilderness side of the Red Sea, or, in other words, until he sees his complete deliverance from sin, the world, and Satan.

Thus, in contemplating the facts of Israel's history, as recorded in the first fifteen chapters of Exodus, we observe that they did not raise a single note of praise until they had passed through the Red Sea. We hear the cry of sore distress, under the cruel lash of

Pharaoh's task-masters, and amid the grievous toil of Egypt's brick-kilns. And we hear the cry of terror when they stood "between Migdol and the sea." All this we hear; but not one note of praise, not a single accent of triumph, until the waters of the Red Sea rolled between them and the land of death and darkness, and they saw all the power of the enemy broken and gone. "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. And *Israel saw that great work which the Lord did* upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord and his servant Moses. *Then sang* Moses and the children of Israel."

Now, what is the simple application of all this to us as Christians? What grand lesson are we to learn from the scenes on the shores of the Red Sea? In a word, of what is the Red Sea a type? And what is the difference between the blood-stained lintel and the divided sea?

The Red Sea is the type of the death of Christ, in its application to all our spiritual enemies, sin, the world, and Satan. By the death of Christ the believer is completely and for ever delivered from the *power* of sin. He is, alas! conscious of the *presence* of sin; but its power is gone. He has died to sin, in the death of Christ; and what power has sin over a dead man? It is the privilege of the Christian to reckon himself as much delivered from the dominion of sin as a man lying dead on the floor. What power has sin over such an one? None whatever. No more has it over the Christian. Sin *dwells* in the believer, and will do so to the end of the chapter; but its *rule* is gone. Christ has wrested the sceptre from the grasp of our old master, and shivered it to atoms. It is not merely that His blood has purged our sins; but His death has broken the power of sin.

It is one thing to know that our sins are forgiven, and another thing altogether to know that "the body of sin is destroyed" — its rule ended — its dominion gone. Many will tell you that they do not question the forgiveness of their past sins, but they do not know what to say as to indwelling sin. They fear lest, after all, that may come against them, and bring them into judgement. Such persons are, to use the figure, "between Migdol and the sea." They have not learnt the doctrine of Romans 6. They have not as yet, in their

Spiritual intelligence and apprehension, reached the resurrection side of the Red Sea. They do not know what it is to be dead unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And let the reader particularly note the force of the apostle's word, "*reckon*." How very different it is, in every way, from our word, "*realise*!" This latter word may do very well where natural or human things are concerned. We can realize physical or material facts; but where a spiritual truth is involved, it is not a question of realising, but of reckoning. How can I realize that I am dead to sin? All my own experience, my own feelings, my inward self-consciousness seems to offer a flat contradiction to the truth. I cannot realise that I am dead; but God tells me I am. He assures me that He counts me to have died to sin when Christ died. I believe it; not because I feel it, but because God says it. Reckon myself to be what God tells me I am. If I were sinless; if I had no sin in me, I should never be told to reckon myself dead to sin; neither should I ever be called to listen to such words as, "Let not sin, therefore, *reign* in your mortal body." But it is just because I have sin dwelling in me, and in order to give me full practical deliverance from its reigning I power, that I am taught the grand enfranchising truth, that the dominion of sin is broken by the death of Christ.

How do I know this? Is it because I feel it? Certainly not. How could I feel it? How could I realise it? How could I ever have the self-consciousness of it, while in the body? Impossible. But God tells me I am dead to sin. I believe it. I do not reason about it. I do not stagger at it because I cannot find any evidence of its truth in myself. I take God at His word. I reckon myself to be what He tells me I am. I do not endeavour to struggle, and strive, and work myself into a sinless state which is impossible. Neither do I imagine myself to be in it, which were a deceit and a delusion; but by a simple, childlike faith, I take the blessed ground which faith assigns me, in association with a dead and risen Christ. I look at Christ, and see in Him, according to God's word, the true expression of what I am, in the Divine Presence. I do not reason from myself upwards, but I reason from God downwards. This makes all the difference. It is just. the difference between unbelief and faith — between law and grace — between human religion and divine Christianity. If I reason

from self, my process of reasoning is carried on in the dark, and all my conclusions must be utterly false. But if, on the other hand, I reason from God, my process of reasoning is carried on in the light, even the light of His eternal truth, and all my conclusions are divinely sound.

It is an unspeakable mercy to get done with self, in all its phases and in all its workings, and to be brought to rest, in all simplicity, on the written word, and on the Christ which that written word presents to our souls. Self-occupation is the death-blow to fellowship, and a complete barrier to the soul's rest. It is absolutely impossible for any one to enjoy peace so long as he is occupied with himself. He must cease from self, and hearken to God's word, and rest, without a single question, on its pure, precious, and everlasting record. God's word never changes. I change; my frames, my feelings, my experience, my circumstances, change continually; but God's word is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

Furthermore, it is a grand and essential point for the soul to apprehend that Christ is the only definition of the believer's place before God. This gives immense power, liberty, and blessing. "As he is, so are we, in this world." (1 John 4:17) This is something perfectly wonderful; only let us ponder it. Let us think of a poor, wretched, guilty, slave of sin, a bondsman of Satan, a votary of the world, exposed to eternal judgement — the flames of an everlasting hell — such an one taken up by sovereign grace, delivered completely from the grasp of Satan, the dominion of sin, the power of this present evil world — pardoned, washed, justified, brought nigh to God, accepted in Christ, and perfectly and for ever identified with Him, so that the Holy Ghost can say, as Christ is, so is he in this world.

All this seems too good to be true; and, most assuredly, it is too good for us to get; but, blessed be the God of all grace, and blessed be the Christ of God it is not too good for Him to give. God gives like Himself. He will be God, spite of our unworthiness and Satan's opposition. He will act in a way worthy of Himself, and worthy of the Son of His love. Were it a question of our deservings, we could only think of the deepest and darkest pit of hell. But seeing it is a question of what is worthy of God to give, and that He gives

according to His estimate of the worthiness of Christ, then, verily, we can think of the very highest place in heaven. The glory of God, and the worthiness of His Son, are involved in His dealings with us; and hence everything that could possibly stand in the way of our eternal blessedness, has been disposed of in such a manner as to secure the divine glory, and furnish a triumphant answer to every plea of the enemy. Is it a question of trespass? "He has forgiven us all trespasses." Is it a question of sin? He has condemned sin. Is it a question of guilt? It is cancelled by the blood of the cross. Is it a question of death? He has taken away its sting, and actually made it part of our property. Is it a question of Satan? He has destroyed him. Is it a question of the world? He has delivered us from it, and snapped every link which connected us with it.

Thus, beloved Christian reader, it stands with us, if we are to be taught by scripture — if we are to take God at His word — if we are to believe what He says. And, we may add, if it be not thus, we are in our sins; under the power of sin; in the grasp of Satan; obnoxious to death; part and parcel of an evil, Christless, Godless, world, and exposed to the unmitigated wrath of God — the vengeance of eternal fire.

Oh! that the blessed Spirit may open the eyes of God's people, and give them to see their proper place, their proper portion, on resurrection ground, in association with a risen and glorified Christ.

PART 3.

Having glanced at two of the leading points in our subject, namely, Israel under the shelter of the blood; and Israel on the shores of the Red Sea; we have, now, to contemplate for a few moments, Israel crossing the Jordan, and celebrating the paschal feast at Gilgal, in which they represent the true position of Christians now.

The Christian is one who is not only sheltered from judgement by the blood of the Lamb, but delivered from this present evil world, by the death of Christ, and associated with Him where He now is, at the right hand of God. He is blessed with all spiritual blessings, in the heavenlies in Christ. He is, thus, a heavenly man, and, as such, is called to walk — in this world, in all the varied relationships and

responsibilities in which the good hand of God has placed him. He is not a monk, or an ascetic, or a man living in the clouds — fit neither for earth or heaven. He is not one who lives in a dreamy, misty, unpractical region; but, on the contrary, one whose happy privilege it is, from day to day, to reflect, amid the scenes and circumstances of earth, the graces and virtues of a heavenly Christ with whom, through infinite grace, and on the solid ground of accomplished redemption, he is linked by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Such is the Christian, according to the teaching of the New Testament. Let the reader see that he understands it. It is very real, very definite, very positive, very practical. a child may know it, and realise it, and exhibit it. A Christian is one whose sins are forgiven — who possesses eternal life and knows it — in whom the Holy Ghost dwells — He is accepted in, and associated with a risen and glorified Christ — He has broken with the world, is dead to sin and the law, and finds His object, and His delight, and his spiritual sustenance in the Christ who loved him and gave Himself for him, and for whose coming he waits every day of his life.

This, we repeat, is the New Testament idea of a Christian. How immensely it differs from the ordinary type of Christian profession around us, we need not say. But let the reader measure himself by the divine standard, and see wherein he comes short; for of this he may rest assured, that there is no reason whatsoever, so far as the love of God, or the work of Christ, or the testimony of the Holy Ghost is concerned, why he should not be in the full enjoyment of all the rich and rare spiritual blessings which appertain to the true Christian position. Dark unbelief, fed by legality, bad theology and spurious religiousness, robs many of God's dear children of their proper place and portion. And not only so, but from want of a thorough break with the world, many are sadly hindered from the clear perception and full realisation of their position and privileges as heavenly men.

But we are rather anticipating the instruction unfolded to us in the typical history of Israel, in Joshua 3-5 to which we shall now turn. "And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass, after

three days, that the officers went through the host. And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. *Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this sway heretofore.*" Joshua 3:1-4.

It is most desirable that the reader should, with all simplicity and clearness, seize the true spiritual import of the river Jordan. It typifies the death of Christ in one of its grand aspects, just as the Red Sea typifies it in another. When the children of Israel stood on the wilderness side of the Red Sea, they sang the song of redemption. They were a delivered people — delivered from Egypt and the power of Pharaoh. They saw all their enemies dead on the sea shore. They could even anticipate, in glowing accents, their triumphal entrance into the promised land. "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them: by the greatness of thine arm they shall be still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."

All this was perfectly magnificent, and divinely true. But they were not yet in Canaan. Jordan — of which, most surely, there is no mention in their glorious song of victory — lay between them and the promised land. True, in the purpose of God, and in the judgement of faith, the land was theirs; but they had to traverse the wilderness, cross the Jordan, and take possession.

How constantly we see all this exemplified in the history of souls. When first converted, there is nothing but joy and victory and praise. They know their sins forgiven; they are filled with wonder,

love and praise. Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, and they can rejoice in hope of His glory, yea and joy in Himself through Jesus Christ our Lord. They are in Romans 5:1-11; and, in one sense, there can be nothing higher. Even in heaven itself, we shall have nothing higher or better than "joy in God." Persons sometimes speak of Romans 8 being higher than Romans 5. But what can be higher than "joy in God?" If we are brought to God, we have reached the most exalted point to which any soul can come. To know Him as our portion, our rest, our stay, our object, our all; to have all our springs in Him, and know Him as a perfect covering for our eyes, at all times and in all places, and under all circumstances. This is heaven itself to the believer.

But there is this difference between Romans 5 and Romans 8 that 6 and 7 lie between; and when the soul has travelled practically through these latter, and learnt how to apply their profound and precious teaching to the great questions of indwelling sin and the law, then is it in a better state, though, most assuredly, not in a higher standing.

We repeat, and with emphasis, the words, "*travelled practically.*" For it must be even so, if we would really enter into these holy mysteries, according to God. It is easy to talk about being "dead to sin" and "dead to the law" — easy to see these things written in Romans 6 and Romans 7 easy to grasp, in the intellect, the mere theory of these things. But the question is, have we made our own of them? — Have they been applied practically to our souls, by the power of the Holy Ghost? And are they livingly exhibited in our ways, to the glory of Him who, at such a cost to Himself, has brought us into such a marvellous place of blessing and privilege?

It is much to be feared that there is a vast amount of merely intellectual traffic in these deep and precious mysteries of our most holy faith which — were they only laid hold of in spiritual power — are calculated to produce the most marked results in practice.

But, we must return to our theme; and, in doing so, we would ask the reader if he really understands the true spiritual import of the river Jordan? What does it really mean? We have said that it typifies the death of Christ. But in what aspect? — For that precious death

has many and various aspects. We believe the Jordan sets forth the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, not so much in its application to that from which we are delivered, as to that into which we are introduced. The Red Sea delivered Israel from Egypt and the power of Pharaoh. Jordan brought them into the land of Canaan.

We find both in the death of Christ. He, blessed be His Name, has by His death on the cross — His death for us, delivered us from our sins — from guilt and condemnation — from Satan's power, and from this present evil world.

But, more than this, He has by the same infinitely precious work, brought us, now, into an entirely new position, in living union and association with Himself, where He is at God's right hand. Such is the distinct teaching of Ephesians 2. "But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath *quickened us together with Christ* (by grace ye are saved); and *hath raised us up together*, and made us *sit together in the heavenlies* in Christ Jesus." Verses 4-6.

Note the little word "*Hath*." He is not speaking of what God *will* do; but of what He *hath done* — done for us and with us in Christ Jesus. The believer is not one who is waiting to go to heaven when he dies. He is there already in the Person of His living and glorified Head — there, too, in spirit and by faith.

Is all this real and true? As real and true as that Christ hung on the cross and lay in the grave. As real and true as that we were dead in trespasses and sins. As real and true as the eternal truth of God can make it. As real and true as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the body of every true believer.

Mark, reader, we are not, now, speaking of the practical working out of all this glorious truth in the life of Christians, from day to day. This is another thing altogether. Alas! alas! if our only idea of true Christian position were to be drawn from the practical career of professing Christians, we might give up Christianity as a myth, a sham and a fable.

But thank God, it is not so. We must learn what true Christianity is from the pages of the New Testament; and, having learnt it there judge ourselves, our ways, our surroundings, by its heavenly light. In this way, while we shall ever have to confess and mourn over our shortcomings, our hearts shall, ever more and more, be filled with praise to Him whose infinite grace has brought us into such a glorious position in union and fellowship with His own Son — a position, blessed be God, in nowise dependent upon our personal state; but which, if really apprehended, must exert a powerful influence upon our entire course, conduct and character.

PART 4.

The more deeply we ponder the typical instruction presented in the river Jordan, the more clearly we must see that the whole Christian position is involved in the standpoint from which we contemplate it. If Jordan means death, and we have to meet it, then, verily, our prospect is a gloomy one. death is the wages of sin, and sin is death's sting; and most surely, if we have to encounter death, there can be but the one terrible issue.

But, thanks be to God, it is not so. The great Antitype of the ark has passed over before us into Jordan, to stem its torrent for us, and make it a dry path for our feet, so that we might pass clean over into our heavenly inheritance. The Prince of life has destroyed, on our behalf, him that had the power of death. He has taken the sting from death; yea, He has made death itself the very means by which we reach, even now, in spirit and by faith, the true heavenly Canaan.

Let us see how all this is unfolded in our type. Mark particularly the commandment given by the officers of the host. "When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it." The ark must go first. They dared not to move one inch along that mysterious way, until the symbol of the divine presence had gone before.

"Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: *come not near unto it that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way*

heretofore." It was an unknown, an untrodden way. No mortal could tread it with impunity. Death and destruction are linked together. "It is appointed unto men" — not to all men, thank God — "once to die; but after this the judgement." (Heb. 9) Who can stand before the king of terrors? Who can face that grim and terrible foe? Who can encounter the swellings of Jordan? Poor Peter thought he could; but he was sadly mistaken. He said unto Jesus, "Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, *thou canst not follow me now*; but thou shalt follow me afterwards."

How fully these words explain the import of that mystic "space" between Israel and the ark. Peter did not understand that space. He had not studied aright Joshua 3:4. He knew nothing of that terrible pathway which his blessed Master was about to enter upon. "Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake."

Poor dear Peter! How little he knew of himself, or of that which he was — sincerely, no doubt, though ignorantly — undertaking to do! How little did he imagine that the very sound of death's dark river, heard even in the distance, would be sufficient so to terrify him, as to make him curse and swear that he did not know his Master! "Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice."

"Yet there shall be a space between you and it." How needful! How absolutely essential! Truly there was a space between Peter and his Lord. Jesus had to go before. He had to meet death in its most terrific form. He had to tread that rough path in profound solitude — for who could accompany Him? "There shall be a space between you and it: come not near to it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have — not passed this way heretofore."

"Thou canst not follow me now': but thou shalt follow me *afterwards.*" Blessed Master! He would not suffer His poor feeble servant to enter upon that terrible path, until He Himself had gone before, and so entirely changed its character, that the pathway of death should be lighted up with the beams of life and immortality.

Our Jesus has "abolished death, and brought life and incorruptibility to light by the gospel."

Thus death is no longer death to the believer. It was death to Jesus, in all its intensity, in all its horrors, in all its reality. He met it as the power which Satan wields over the soul of man. He met it as the penalty due to sin. He met it as the just judgement of God against sin — against us. There was not a single feature, not a single ingredient, not a single circumstance, which could possibly render death formidable which did not enter into the death of Christ. He met all; and, blessed be God, we are accounted as having gone through all in and by Him. We died in Him, so that a death has no further claim upon us, or power over us. Its claims are disposed of, its power broken and gone for all believers. The whole scene is cleared completely of death, and filled with life and incorruptibility.

And hence, in Peter's case, we find our Lord, in the last chapter of John, most graciously meeting the desire of His servant's heart — a desire in which he was perfectly sincere — the desire to follow his beloved Lord. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God." Thus death, instead of being the judgement of God to overwhelm Peter, was turned into a means by which Peter could glorify God.

What a glorious fact! What a stupendous mystery! How it magnifies the cross, or rather the One who hung thereon! What a mighty revelation, when a poor sinful man can, in death, glorify God! So completely has death been robbed of its sting — so thoroughly has its character been changed — that, instead of shrinking from it with terror, we can meet it — if it does come — and go through it with songs of victory; and instead of its being to us the heavy wages of sin, it is a means by which we can glorify God.

All praise to Him who has so wrought for us — to Him who has gone down into Jordan's deepest depths for us, and made there a highway by which His ransomed people can pass over into their heavenly inheritance! May our hearts adore Him! May all our

powers be stirred up to magnify His holy name May our whole life be devoted to His praise.

But we must proceed with our type.

"And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Joshua stands before us as a type of the risen Christ, leading His people, in the power of the Holy Ghost, into their heavenly inheritance. The priests bearing the ark into the midst of Jordan typify Christ going down into death for us, and destroying completely its power. "He passed through death's dark raging flood, to make our rest secure ;" and not only to make it secure, but to lead us into it, in association with Himself, now, in spirit and by faith; by-and-by, in actual fact.

"And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the *living* God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan."

The passage of the ark into Jordan proved two things, namely, the presence of the living God in the midst of His people; and that He would most surely drive out all their enemies from before them. The death of Christ is the basis and the guarantee of everything to faith. Grant us but this, that Christ has gone down into death for us, and we argue, with all possible confidence, that, in this one great fact, all is secured. God is with us, and God is for us. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The difficulty of unbelief is, "How shall he?" The difficulty of faith is, "How shall he not?"

Israel might wonder how all the hosts of Canaan could ever be expelled from before them; let them gaze on the ark in the midst of

Jordan, and cease to wonder, cease to doubt. The less is included in the greater. And hence we can say, What may we not expect, seeing that Christ has died for us? There is nothing too good, nothing too great, nothing too glorious, for God to do for us, and in us, and with us, seeing He has not spared His only-begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us all. Everything is secured for us by the precious death of Christ. It has opened up the everlasting floodgates of the love of God, so that the rich streams thereof might flow down into the very depths of our souls. It fills us with the sweetest assurance that the One who could bruise His only begotten Son, on the cursed tree, for us, will meet our every need, carry us through all our difficulties, and lead us into the full possession and enjoyment of all that His eternal purpose of grace has in store for us. Having given us such a proof of His love, even when we were yet sinners, what may we not expect at His hands now that He views us in association with that blessed One who glorified Him in death — the death that He died for us? When Israel saw the ark in the midst of Jordan, they were entitled to consider that all was secured. True they had, as we know, to take possession: they had to plant their feet upon the inheritance; but the power that could stem death's dark waters, could also drive out every foe from before them. and put them in peaceful possession of all that God had promised.

PART 5.

In closing this series of brief papers on Gilgal, we must turn our thoughts to the practical application of that which has been engaging our attention. If it be true — and it is true — that Jesus died for us, it is equally true that we have died in Him, as one of our own poets has sweetly put it:

"For me, Lord Jesus, thou hast died

And I have died in thee;

Thou' t risen; my bands are all untied;

And now Thou livest in me.

The Fathers face of radiant grace

Shines, now in light on me."

Now this is a great practical truth — none more so. It lies at the very foundation of all true Christianity. If Christ has died for us, then, in very deed, He has taken us completely out of our old condition, with all that appertained to it, and placed us upon an entirely new footing. We can look back, from resurrection ground into the dark river of death, and see there, in its deepest depths, the memorial of the victory gained for us by the Prince of Life. We do not look forward to death; we look back at it. We can truly say, "The bitterness of death is past."

Jesus met death for us, in its most terrible form. Just as the river of Jordan was divided when it presented its most formidable appearance — "For Jordan overfloweth all its banks all the time of harvest" — so our Jesus encountered our last great enemy, vanquished him in his most terrific form, and left behind, in the very centre of death's dark and dreary domain, the imperishable record of His glorious victory. All praise, homage, and adoration to His peerless name! It is our privilege, by faith and in spirit, to stand on Canaan's side of Jordan, and erect our memorial of what the Saviour, the true Joshua, has done for us.

"And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man. And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, *out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm*, twelve stones; and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging-place where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, *out of every tribe a man*. And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the Lord your God, into the midst of Jordan, and take you up *everyman of you a stone* upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel. That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, that the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of

Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be *for a memorial* unto the children of Israel for ever." Joshua 4:1-7.

The great fact was to be seized, and practically carried out, by the whole assembly — "of every tribe a man" — "Every man of you a stone upon his shoulder" — a stone taken from the very spot where the priests' feet stood firm. All were to be brought into living personal contact with the great mysterious fact that the waters of Jordan were cut off. All were to engage in erecting such a memorial of this fact as should elicit inquiry from their children as to what it meant. It was never to be forgotten.

What a lesson is here for us! Are we erecting our memorial? Are we giving evidence — such evidence as may strike even the mind of a child — of the fact that our Jesus has vanquished the power of death for us? Are we affording any practical proof in daily life that Christ has died for us, and that we have died in Him? Is there aught in our actual history, from day to day, answering to the figure set forth in the passage just quoted — "Every man of you a stone upon his shoulder?" Are we declaring plainly that we have passed clean over Jordan — that we belong to heaven — that we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit? Do our children see aught in our habits and ways, in our spirit and deportment, in our whole character and manner of life, leading them to inquire, "What mean ye by these things?" Are we living as those who are dead with Christ — dead to sin — dead to the world? Are we practically sitting loose to the world — letting go our hold of present things, in the power of communion with a risen Christ?

These are searching questions for the soul, beloved Christian reader. Let us seek to meet them honestly as in the divine presence. We profess these things, we hold them in theory. We say we believe that Jesus died for us, and that we died in Him. Where is the proof? Where the abiding memorial? Where the stone on the shoulder? Let us judge ourselves honestly before God. Let us no longer rest satisfied with anything short of the thorough, practical, habitual, carrying out of the great truth, that "We are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God." Mere profession is worthless. We want the living power — the true result — the proper fruit.

"And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. *And those twelve stones which they took out of Jordan*" — stones of peculiar import — no other stones could tell such a tale, teach such a lesson, or symbolise such a stupendous fact — no other stones like them — "those twelve stones did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, *Israel came over this Jordan on dry land*. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord that it is mighty; that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever."

Here, then, we see Israel at Gilgal. "Everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua." Every member of the host had passed clean over Jordan, not one had been suffered to feel the slightest touch of the river of death. Grace had brought them all safely over into the inheritance promised to their fathers. They were not only separated from Egypt by the Red Sea, but actually brought into Canaan across the dry bed of the Jordan, and encamped in Gilgal, in the plains of Jericho.

And now mark what follows. "And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites which were on — the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of — the Canaanites which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel. *At that time*" — note the words! when all the nations were paralysed with terror at the very thought of this people — "At that time the Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee *sharp knives*, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time."

How deeply significant is this! How suggestive are these "sharp knives!" How needful! If Israel are about to bring the sword upon the Canaanites, Israel must have the sharp knife applied to

themselves. They had never been circumcised in the wilderness. The reproach of Egypt had never been rolled away from them. And ere they could celebrate the Passover, and eat of the old corn of the land of Canaan, they must have the sentence of death written upon them. No doubt this was aught but agreeable to nature, but it must be done. How could they take possession of Canaan with the reproach of Egypt resting upon them? How could uncircumcised people dispossess the Canaanites! Impossible. The sharp knives had to do their work throughout the camp of Israel ere they could eat of Canaan's food, or prosecute its warfare.

“And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise. All the people that came out of Egypt that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way.....And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal ("rolling") unto this day. And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month, at even, in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the Passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn, in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."

Here, then, we have a type of the full Christian position. The Christian is a heavenly man, dead to the world, crucified with Christ, associated with Him where He now is: and, while waiting for His appearing, occupied in heart with Him, feeding, by faith, upon Him as the proper nourishment of the new man.

Such is the Christian's position — such his portion; but in order to enter fully into the enjoyment thereof, there must be the application of the “sharp knife” to all that belongs to mere nature. There must be the sentence of death written upon that which scripture designates “the old man."

All this must be really and practically entered into, if we would maintain our position, or enjoy our proper portion as heavenly men. If we are indulging nature, if we are living in a low, worldly atmosphere, if we are going in for this world's pursuits, its pleasures, its politics, its riches, its honours, its fashions, and its distinctions, then, verily, it is impossible that we can be enjoying fellowship with our risen Head and Lord. [The reader may here remark that "the old corn of the land of Canaan" is a type of Christ risen and glorified. The manna is a type of Christ in His humiliation. The remembrance of Him in the latter is ineffably precious to the soul. It is sweet to look back and trace His way, as the lowly, humble, self-emptying man. This is to feed upon the hidden manna — "Christ once humbled here." Nevertheless, a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ is the true object for the heart of the Christian; but to enjoy this object, the reproach of this present evil world must be rolled away from us by the spiritual application of the circumcision of Christ.] Christ is in heaven, and to enjoy Him we must be living, in spirit and by faith, where He is. He is not of this world; and if we are of it, we cannot be enjoying fellowship with Him. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." 1 John 1:6.

This is most solemn. If I am living in and of the world, I am walking in darkness, and I can have no fellowship with a heavenly Christ. "Wherefore," says the blessed apostle, "if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" Do we really understand these words? Have we weighed the full force of the expression, "living in the world?" Is the Christian not to be as one living in the world? Clearly not. He is to live in spirit where Christ is. As to fact, He is obviously on this earth, moving up and down, and in and out, in the varied relations of life, and in the varied spheres of action in which the hand of God has set him. But his home is in heaven. His life is there. His object, his rest, his proper all, is in heaven. He does not belong to earth. His citizenship is in heaven; and in order to make this good in actual practice, from day to day, there must be the denial of self, the mortification of our members.

All this comes vividly out in Colossians 3. Indeed, it would be impossible to give a more striking exposition of the entire subject of "Gilgal" than that presented in the following lines: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." And now comes the true spiritual import and application of "Gilgal" and its "sharp knives."

"Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth." May the Holy Spirit lead us into a deeper and fuller understanding of our place, portion, and practice, as Christians! Would to God that we better knew what it is to feed upon the old corn of the land, at the true spiritual Gilgal, that thus we might be better fitted for the conflict and service to which we are called?

Joshua 6 — Joshua 7.

Jericho and Achor — Privilege and Responsibility.

Part 1

The christian reader will do well to turn, first of all, to the two chapters named above, and give them a careful reading. They furnish a very striking and impressive record of the double effect of God's presence with His people. In chapter 6 we are taught that the Divine Presence insured victory over the power of the enemy. In chapter 7 we learn that the Divine Presence demanded judgment upon evil in the bosom of the congregation. The ruins of Jericho demonstrate the one; the great heap of stones in the valley of Achor attests the other.

Now, these two things must never be separated. We see them vividly illustrated in every page of the history of God's people, both in the Old and in the New Testament. The self-same Presence that secures victory demands holiness. Let us never forget this. Yea, let us keep it ever in the remembrance of our hearts. It has an individual as well as a collective application. If we are to walk with God, or, rather, if He is to walk with us, we must judge and put away everything inconsistent with His holy presence. He cannot sanction unjudged evil in His people. He can pardon, heal, restore, and bless; but He is intolerant of evil. "*Our God* is a consuming fire." "The time is come that judgment must *begin* at the house of God."

Should the thought of this discourage or depress any true-hearted child of God, or servant of Christ? Certainly not. It should neither discourage nor depress, but it should make us very watchful over our hearts, very careful as to our ways, our habits of thought and conversation. We have nothing to fear while God is with us, but He cannot possibly sanction evil in His people; and every true lover of holiness will heartily bless Him for this. Could we possibly desire it to be otherwise? Would we wish the standard of holiness to be lowered at all? God forbid.

All those who love His name can give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness, and rejoice in the truth that holiness

becometh His house forever? "Be ye holy, for I am holy." It is not by any means on the pharisaic principle, wrapped up in the words, "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou." Thank God, it is not this. It is not a question of what we are, but of what *He is*. Our character and conduct are to be formed by the truth of what God is. Marvellous grace! Precious privilege!

God must have His people like Himself. If they forget this, He will surely remind them of it. If He, in infinite grace, links His name and His glory with us, it behoves us to look well to our habits and ways, lest we bring any reproach on that name. Is this legal bondage? Nay, it is the holiest liberty. We may rest perfectly assured of this, that we are never further removed from legality than when treading that path of true holiness which becomes all those who bear the name of Christ. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

This great truth holds good at all times. We see it in the ruins of Jericho. We read it in the valley of Achor. What was it that caused the frowning walls and towering bulwarks of Jericho to fall down at the sound of rams' horns and the shout of the people? The presence of Jehovah. And it mattered not if it was but the city of Jericho or the whole land of Canaan, before that invincible Presence.

But what means the humiliating defeat before the insignificant city of Ai? How comes it to pass that the hosts of Israel, so recently triumphant at Jericho, have to flee ignominiously before a mere handful of men at Ai? Ah, the answer tells a sorrowful tale! Here it is; let us harken to it, and ponder it in the deepest depths of our heart. Let us seek to profit by it. Let us be solemnly warned by it. It has been written for our admonition. The Holy Ghost has taken the pains to record it for our learning. Woe be to the one who turns a deaf ear to the warning voice!

"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against" — whom? Achan merely? or his household, or his family, or his tribe? Nay, but

"against the children of Israel"! The whole assembly was involved in the evil. How was this? The Divine Presence imparted a unity to the whole assembly; it bound them all together in such a manner as to involve all in the sin of the one. It was one assembly, and hence it was impossible for any one to take independent ground. The sin of each was the sin of all, because God was in their midst, and He could not countenance unjudged evil. The whole congregation was involved, and had to clear itself of the evil ere Jehovah could lead it on to victory. Had He allowed them to triumph at Ai, it would have argued that He was indifferent to the sin of His people, and that He could give the sanction of His presence to "an accursed thing," which were simply blasphemy against His holy name.

"And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai" — more easily said than done — "and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few" — yet quite too many for Israel with an Achan in the camp. "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men; and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. "And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads."

Here was a strange and unlooked-for experience. "And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?"

Joshua, that beloved and honoured servant of God, did not see, did not understand, that it was the very glory of that "great name" which necessitated the defeat at Ai, just as it had achieved the victory at Jericho. But there were other elements in that glory besides power. There was holiness, and that holiness rendered it impossible for Him to lend the sanction of His presence where there was unjudged evil. Joshua should have concluded that there was something wrong in the condition of the people. He ought to have known that the hindrance was with Israel, and not with Jehovah. The same grace that had given them victory at Jericho would have given it at Ai, if things were right. But, alas, they were not right; and hence defeat, and not victory, was the order of the day. How could there be victory with an accursed thing in the camp? Impossible! Israel must judge the evil, or Jehovah must judge Israel. To have given them a victory at Ai would have been a reproach and a dishonour to the One whose name was called upon them. The Divine Presence absolutely demanded judgment upon the evil; and until that was executed, further progress in the conquest of Canaan was out of the question. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? *Israel hath sinned*" — not merely Achan — "and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. *Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies*, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

This is peculiarly solemn. The whole congregation is held responsible for the evil. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Unbelief may inquire how all are involved in the sin of one; but the Word of God definitely settles the question — "*Israel hath sinned*" — "*they have taken*" — "*they have stolen*" — "*they have dissembled.*" The assembly was one; one in privilege, one in responsibility. As such, the sin of one was the sin of all, and all were called upon to clear themselves thoroughly by putting away the

accursed thing from among them. There was not a single member of the large congregation who was not affected by Achan's sin.

This may seem strange to mere nature, but such is the solemn and weighty truth of God. It was true in the assembly of Israel of old, and assuredly it is not less true in the Church of God now. No one could take independent ground in the assembly of Israel; how much less can he take it in the Church of God? There were over six hundred thousand people who, to speak after the manner of men, were wholly ignorant of what Achan had done; and yet God's word to Joshua was, "Israel hath sinned." All were involved; all were affected; and all had to clear themselves ere Jehovah could again lead them on to victory.

The presence of God in the midst of the assembly formed the unity of all; and the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church of God, the body of Christ now on the earth, binds all up in one divine, indissoluble unity. Hence, to talk of independency is to deny the very foundation-truth of the Church of God, and to prove beyond all question that we understand neither its nature nor its unity as set forth on the page of inspiration.

And if evil creeps into an assembly, how is it to be met? Here it is: "Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." Were they one in privilege? Were they one in the enjoyment of the glory and strength which the Divine Presence secured? Were they one in the splendid triumph at Jericho? Who would deny all this? Who would wish to deny it? Why, then, seek to question their oneness in responsibility — their oneness in respect to the evil in their midst, and all its humbling consequences?

Surely, if there was unity in anything, there was unity in everything. If Jehovah was the God of Israel, He was the God of all, the God of each; and this grand and glorious fact was the solid basis both of their high privileges and their holy responsibilities. How could evil exist in such an assembly, and a single member be unaffected by it? How could there be an accursed thing in their very

midst, and a single member not be defiled? Impossible. We may reason and argue about it until the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, but all the reasoning and argument in the world cannot touch the truth of God, and that truth declares that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

But how is the evil to be discovered? The presence of God reveals it. The self-same power that had levelled the walls of Jericho, detected, revealed, and judged the sin of Achan. It was the double effect of the same blessed Presence, and Israel was called to share in the one as well as in the other. To attempt to separate the two is folly, ignorance, or wickedness. It cannot be done, and ought not to be attempted.

Part 2

We must ever remember, that, in the history of God's ways with His people, privilege and responsibility are intimately bound up together. To talk of privilege, or think of enjoying it, while neglecting the responsibility, is a gross delusion. No true lover of holiness could think for a moment of separating them; nay, he must ever delight in strengthening and perpetuating the precious link.

Thus, for example, in Israel's case, who could estimate aright the high privilege of having Jehovah dwelling in their midst? By day and by night, there He was, to guide and guard, shield and shelter them; to meet their every need, to give them bread from heaven, and bring them forth water out of the rock. His presence was a safeguard against every foe; no weapon formed against them could prosper; not a dog might move his tongue against them; they were at once invulnerable and invincible; with God in their midst they had nothing whatever to fear. He charged Himself with all their wants, whether great or small. He looked after their garments, that they might not wax old; He looked after their feet, that they might not swell; He covered them with the shield of His favour, so that no arrow might touch them; He stood between them and every foe, and flung back in the enemy's face every accusation.

Thus much as to the high privilege. But mark the corresponding and connected responsibility. See how both are

indissolubly bound up together in the following weighty words: "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee: *therefore shall thy camp be holy; that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.*"

Precious privilege! Solemn responsibility! Who would dare to dissolve the hallowed connection? Had Jehovah deigned to come down into their midst, and walk with them, and tabernacle among them? Had He, in infinite grace, condescended to be their travelling companion? Was He there for the exigence of every hour? Yes, blessed be His name. If so, then what did His presence demand? We have seen something of what His presence *secured*; but what did it *demand*? Holiness!

Israel's whole conduct was to be regulated by the great fact of the Divine Presence in their midst. Not only their great public national institutions, but their most private habits, were to be brought under the controlling influence of Jehovah's presence with them. He regulated what they were to eat, what they were to wear, how they were to carry themselves in all the scenes, circumstances and relationships of daily life. By night and by day, sleeping and waking, sitting in the house or walking by the way, alone or in company, He looked after them. Nothing was to be allowed in any wise inconsistent with the holiness and purity which became the presence of the Holy One of Israel.

Was all this irksome? Were the privileges irksome? Was it irksome to be fed, clothed, guided, guarded, and cared for in every possible way? Was it irksome to repose beneath the overshadowing wings of the God of Israel? Surely not. Why, then, should it be irksome to keep their persons, their habits, and their dwellings clean? Must not every true heart, every upright mind, every tender conscience, accept as thoroughly the responsibility which the Divine Presence necessarily involves as the privileges which it infallibly secures? Yea, rather must we not rank the very responsibility itself among our richest and rarest privileges? Unquestionably. Every true lover of holiness will esteem it a signal mercy — a very high order of blessing — to walk in company with One whose presence detects

and condemns every form of evil. "Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

The foregoing train of thought will enable us in some measure to understand the history of Achan, in Joshua 7 — a history solemn and impressive in the highest degree — a history which utters in our hearing, with deepest emphasis, words which our careless hearts are only too ready to forget, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." Had Achan remembered this, it would have taught him the holy necessity of nipping in the very bud the covetousness of his heart, and thus have spared the whole assembly the humiliating defeat at Ai, and all the consequent sorrow and discipline. How terrible to think of one man, for the sake of a little personal gain, which at best could last but for a moment, plunging a whole congregation into the deepest trouble! and, what was worse than all, dishonouring and grieving that blessed One who had deigned, in His infinite goodness, to take up His abode in their midst!

How well it would be if each one of us, when tempted to commit any secret sin, would just pause and ask himself the question, "How can I do this thing, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in me, and bring leaven into the assembly of God's people?" We ought to remember that our private walk has a direct bearing upon all the members of the body. We are either helping or hindering the blessing of all. We are none of us independent atoms; we are members of a body incorporated by the presence of the Holy Ghost; and if we are walking in a loose, carnal, worldly, self-indulgent spirit, we are grieving the Spirit, and injuring all the members.

"But God hath tempered the body together . . . that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12: 24-26).

It may seem hard, to some, to grasp this great practical truth — hard to see how our private condition and conduct can affect our fellow-members; but the simple and obvious fact is, we must either

admit this, or maintain the unscriptural and foolish notion that each Christian is an independent person, having no connection with the whole body of believers. If he be a member of a body, all the members of which are bound together, and linked with the Head by the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost, then, verily, it follows that his walk and ways affect all his fellow-members just as really as, if any member of the human body suffers, all the other members feel it. If there is anything wrong with the hand, the foot feels it. How is this? Because the head feels it. The communication, in every instance, is with the head first, and from the head to the members.

Now, though Achan was not a member of a body, but merely of a congregation, yet we see how his private conduct affected the whole assembly. This is all the more striking, inasmuch as the great truth of the one body was not unfolded, and could not be until — redemption being a grand, accomplished fact — the Head took His seat on the throne of God, and sent down the Holy Ghost to form the body, and link it, by His personal presence and indwelling, to the Head in Heaven. If the secret sin of Achan affected every member of the congregation of Israel, how much more (may we not say?) doth the secret sin of any member of the body of Christ affect all the members thereof!

Let us never forget this weighty truth. May we keep it ever in the remembrance of our hearts, that so we may see the urgent need of a careful, tender, holy walk; that we may not dishonour our glorious Head, grieve the blessed indwelling Spirit, or injure the feeblest member of that body of which, by the sovereign grace of God and the precious blood of Christ, we form a part.

But we must call special attention to the way in which the sin of Achan was traced home to him. It is all most solemn. He had little idea whose eye was resting upon him when he was carrying on his secret wickedness. He would, no doubt, think himself all right, and very successful, when he had the money and the garment safely hidden in his tent. Fatal, guilty, wretched treasure! Unhappy man! How dreadful is the love of money! How terrible is the blinding power of sin! It hardens the heart, deadens the conscience, darkens the understanding, ruins the soul, and in the case before us brought

defeat and disaster upon the whole people of which he formed a part.

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" There is a time for lying on the face, and there is a time for standing on our feet; a time for devout prostration, and a time for decided action. The instructed soul will know the time for each.

"Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them; for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: *thou canst not stand before thine enemies*, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you."

How peculiarly solemn is all this! how very arresting! how soul-subduing! God's people — those who bear His name, and profess to hold His truth, who stand identified with Him in this world — must be holy. He cannot lend the sanction of His presence to that which is unholy or impure. Those who enjoy the high privilege of being associated with God are solemnly responsible to keep themselves unspotted from the world, else He must take down the rod of discipline and do His strange work in their midst. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."

"Thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man."

Ah, this was coming to close quarters! The sinner might seek to persuade himself that discovery was impossible; he might cherish the fond hope of escaping amid the many thousands of Israel. Miserable delusion! He might be sure his sin would find him out. The self-same Presence that secured individual blessing, secured with equal fidelity the detection of the most secret individual sin. Escape was impossible. If Jehovah was in the midst of His people to lay Jericho in ruins at their feet, He was there also to lay bare, in its deepest roots, the sin of the congregation, and to bring forth the sinner from his hiding-place to bear the penalty of his wickedness.

How searching are God's ways! First, the twelve tribes are summoned, that the transgressor might be manifested. Then, one tribe is fixed upon. Nearer still! the family is fixed upon! and yet nearer! the very household is actually singled out; and, last of all, "*man by man*"! Thus, out of six hundred thousand people, the all-searching eye of Jehovah reads the sinner through and through, and marks him off before the assembled thousands of Israel.

"And it shall be that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

"So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken "

"Our God is a consuming fire." He cannot tolerate evil in the ways of His people. This accounts for the solemn scene before us. The natural mind may reason about all this — it may marvel why the taking of a little money and a garment from amid the spoils of a doomed city should involve such awful consequences and entail such a severe punishment. But the natural mind is incapable of understanding the ways of God.

And may we not ask the objector, How could God sanction evil in His people? How could He go on with it? What was to be done with it? If He was about to execute judgment upon the seven nations of Canaan, could He possibly be indifferent to sin in His people? Most assuredly not. His word is, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." The very fact of His taking them into relationship with Himself was the ground of His dealing with them in holy discipline.

It is the height of folly for man to reason about the severity of divine judgment, or the apparent lack of proportion between the sin and the punishment. All such reasoning is false and impious. What was it that brought in all the misery, the sorrow, the desolation, the sickness, pain, and death — all the untold horrors of the last six thousand years? What was the source of it all? Just the one little act — as man would call it — of eating a bit of fruit? But this little act was that terrible thing called sin — yea, rebellion — against God!

And what was needed to atone for this? How was it to be met? What stands over against it as the only adequate expression of the judgment of a holy God? — What? The burning in the valley of Achor? Nay. The everlasting burnings of hell? Nay; something far deeper and more solemn still. What? The cross of the Son of God! The awful mystery of the death of Christ! — that terrible cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Let men remember this, and cease to reason.

Part 3

It is always well for the Christian to be able to give a calm and decided answer to the objection which infidelity is sure to offer to the actings of divine government. The answer is this: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" If the creature is to be allowed to judge the Creator, there is an end of all government in the vast universe of God. Hence, when we hear men daring to pronounce judgment upon the ways of God, and undertaking to decide what is or what is not fit for God to do, this grand preliminary question invariably suggests itself, "Who is to be judge?" Is man to judge God? or is God to judge man? If the former, there is no God at all;

and if the latter, then man has to bow his head in reverent silence, and own his utter ignorance and folly.

The fact is, if man could fathom the government of God, he would no longer be man, but God. What contemptible folly, therefore, for a poor, shallow, ignorant, short-sighted mortal to attempt to pronounce an opinion upon the profound mysteries of divine government! His opinion is not only utterly worthless, but, in the judgment of every truly pious mind, positively impious and blasphemous — a daring insult offered to the throne, to the nature and to the character of God, for which he will, most assuredly, have to answer before the seat-seat of Christ, unless he repent and find pardon through the blood of the cross. The foregoing line of thought has suggested itself in connection with the solemn scene in the valley of Achor. The unbelieving mind may be disposed to start an objection on the ground of the apparent severity of the judgment; to institute a comparison between the offence and the punishment; to call in question the equity of Achan's children being involved in their father's sin.

To all this we simply reply, "Are we competent to judge?" If any one thinks he is, it is tantamount to saying that God is not fit to govern the world, but should give place to man. This is the real root of the whole matter. Infidelity wants to get rid of God altogether, and set up man in His place. If God is to be God, then, most certainly, His ways, the actings of His government, the mysteries of His providence, His purposes, His counsels and His judgments must lie far beyond the range of the greatest human or angelic mind. Neither angel, man nor devil can comprehend Deity. Let men own this, and hush into eternal silence their puny, ignorant, and contemptible reasonings. Let them take up the language of Job when his eyes were opened: "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto Me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

When the soul gets into this attitude, there is an end of all infidel questions. Till then there is little use in discussion.

Let us now turn for a few moments to contemplate the solemn scene in the valley of Achor; and let us remember that "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." May we learn to watch with holy jealousy the incipient workings of evil in our hearts. It is on these men ought to sit in judgment, and not on the pure and perfect actings of divine government.

Joshua's address to Achan is solemn, weighty, and powerful: "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me."

Here is the all-important matter. "Give glory to Jehovah, God of Israel." All hinges upon this. The Lord's glory is the one perfect standard by which all is to be judged — the perfect gauge by which everything is to be measured — the perfect touchstone by which all is to be tried. The one great question for the people of God in all ages and in all dispensations is this: *What is suited to the glory of God?* In comparison with this, all other questions are less than secondary. It is not a question of what is suitable to us, or what we can tolerate or agree with. This is a very minor consideration indeed. What we have ever to look to, and think of, and provide for, is the glory of God. We have to ask ourselves the question, in reference to everything that comes before us, "Will this comport with the glory of God?" If not, let us, by His grace, fling it aside.

Well would it have been for Achan had he thought of this when his eye rested on the cursed treasure! What misery it would have saved him! What sorrow and trouble it would have saved his brethren! But, alas, people forget all this when lust dims the eye and vanity and folly possess the heart! and onward they go until the heavy judgment of a holy, sin-hating God overtakes them. And then, forsooth, men presume to comment upon such judgment as unworthy of a gracious and beneficent Being. Ignorant presumption! They would fain have a god of their own imagination, one like themselves, who can make light of sin and tolerate all sorts of evil. The God of the Bible, the God of Christianity, the God of the Cross,

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not suit such infidel reasoners. Their deep heart-utterance to Him is, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."

"And Achan said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: when I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."

Here the dark, defiling stream is traced up to its source in the heart of this unhappy man. Oh, how little did he think whose eye was resting on him during the entire progress of this melancholy and disastrous affair! He thought of but one thing, namely, the gratification of his covetousness. He saw, he *coveted*, he *took*, he *hid*; and there, no doubt, he thought the matter would end. He would have his treasure, and no one would be the wiser.

But, ah, the eye of Jehovah, the God of Israel, was upon him — that holy eye, from which no secret thing is hidden, which penetrates the depths of the human heart and takes in at a glance all the hidden spring of human action. Yes, God saw it all, and He would make Israel see it, and Achan also. Hence the lamentable defeat at Ai, and all that followed.

How perfectly solemn! — the whole assembly involved in shameful defeat and disaster — Joshua and the elders of Israel with rent garments and dust upon their heads, prostrate on their faces from morning till evening! And then, the divine challenge and rebuke! the solemn muster of the hosts of Israel, tribe by tribe, family by family, household by household, man by man!

And why all this? Just to trace the evil to its source, bring it out, and have it judged in the sight of every creature. All created intelligence must be made to see and confess that the throne of God can have no fellowship with evil. The same power that had levelled the walls of Jericho, and executed judgment upon its guilty inhabitants, was to be manifested in detecting Achan's sin, and in evoking from the very depths of his convicted heart the confession

of his terrible guilt. He in common with all his brethren, had heard Jehovah's solemn charge, "And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed when ye take of the accursed thing, and make" — not merely any one individual's tent, but — "*the camp of Israel* a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."

All this was plain enough. No one could mistake it. It only needed an attentive ear and an obedient heart. It was as plain as the commandment delivered to Adam and Eve amid the bowers of Eden. But Achan, like Adam, transgressed the plain and positive command. Instead of hiding it in his heart, that he might not sin against God, he trampled it under his feet, that he might gratify his sinful desire. He fixed his covetous gaze upon the accursed thing, in itself nothing but a wretched pile of dust, but, through Satan's power and Achan's erring heart, turned into an occasion of sin, shame, and sorrow.

O how sad, how sorrowful, how terrible a thing it is to allow the poor heart to go after the wretched things of this world! What are they all worth? If we could have all the garments that were ever made in Babylon; all the gold and silver that ever issued from the mines of Peru, California, and Australia; all the pearls and diamonds that ever glittered on the kings, princes and nobles of this world — could they give us one hour's true happiness? Could they send a single ray of heavenly light into the soul? Could they impart to us one moment's pure, spiritual enjoyment? Not they. In themselves they are but perishable dust, and when used of Satan a positive curse, misery, and degradation. Not all the riches and material comforts which this world could offer are worth one hour's holy communion with our heavenly Father and our precious Saviour. Why should we covet this world's wretched wealth? Our God will supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Is not this enough? Why should we put ourselves within the range of Satan's power by setting our hearts upon the riches, honours, or pleasures, of a world which is ruled by the arch-enemy of God and of our souls? How well it would have been for Achan had he rested

content with what the God of Israel had given him! How happy he might have been had he been satisfied with the furniture of his tent, the smile of Jehovah, and the answer of a good conscience!

But he was not; and hence the appalling scene in the valley of Achor, the record of which is enough to strike terror into the stoutest heart. "So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord. And Joshua, and *all Israel* with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And *all Israel* stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor (that is, trouble), unto this day" (Joshua 7: 19-26).

How deeply solemn is all this! What a warning note it sounds in our ears! Let us not attempt, under the false influence of one sided notions of grace, to turn aside the holy edge of such a passage of Scripture. Let us read with earnest attention the inscription on that awful monument in the valley of Achor. What is it? "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." And again, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." And further, "Our God is a consuming fire."

Weighty, solemn, searching words these! — much needed, surely, in these days of flippant, easy-going profession, when the doctrines of grace are so much on our lips, but the fruits of righteousness so little seen in our lives. May we learn from them the urgent need of watchfulness over our hearts, and over our private life, that evil may be judged and nipped in the bud, so that it may not bring forth its sad, shameful and sorrowful fruit in our practical

career, to the gross dishonour of the Lord and the grievous sorrow of those with whom we are linked in the bonds of fellowship.

Part 4

There is a very interesting allusion to "the valley of Achor" in Hosea 2 at which we may just glance in passing, though it does not connect itself with the special line of truth which we have had before us in this series of papers.

Jehovah, in speaking of Israel, by His prophet says: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and *the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there*, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (ver. 14-15).

What touching grace shines in these words! "The valley of Achor" — the place of "trouble" — the place of deep sorrow and shame — the place of humiliation and judgment — the place where the fire of Jehovah's righteous wrath consumed the sin of His people — there shall be "a door of hope" for Israel by and by; there, too, she shall sing as in the days of her youth. How wonderful to hear of songs of praise in the valley of Achor! What glorious triumphs of grace! What a bright and blessed future for Israel!

"It shall be *at that day*, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi [my husband] and shalt call me no more Baali [my lord]. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name *And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever*; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies: I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord."

From this digression to "the valley of Achor" in the future, we now return to our special theme; and in so doing we shall ask the reader to turn with us, for a few moments, to the opening chapters of the Acts. Here we find the same grand results of the presence of God in the midst of His people as we have seen in the opening of the

book of Joshua; only in a much more glorious manner, as we might expect.

On the day of Pentecost, God the Holy Ghost came down to form the assembly, and take up His abode therein. This great and glorious fact was grounded on the accomplishment of the work of atonement, as attested by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His glorification at the right hand of God.

We cannot attempt to unfold this truth in all its bearings in this brief article; we merely call the reader's attention to the two practical points which have been before us — namely, the privilege and responsibility connected with the Lord's presence in the midst of His people. If He was there to *bless* — as He most surely was — He was also, and quite as surely, there to *judge*. The two things go together, and we must not attempt to separate them.

And first, then, we see the effect and blessings of the Divine Presence in the assembly: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need." The blessed effect of the realized presence of the Holy Ghost was to bind their hearts together in a holy and loving fellowship; to cause them to let go earthly things, and to lead them to merge their personal interests in the common good.

Precious fruits! Would that we saw more of them! No doubt times are changed; but God is not changed, and the effect of His realized presence is not changed. True, we are not in Acts 2. Pentecostal times are passed away; Christendom has lapsed in complete failure; the professing Church has hopelessly fallen. All this is sadly true; but Christ our Head abides in all His living power and unchangeable grace. "The foundation of God standeth sure" — as sure, as safe and as solid to-day as it was on the day of Pentecost. No change here, blessed be God; hence we may say, with all possible confidence, that where His presence is realized, even though it be only by "two or three" gathered to the name of Jesus, there the same lovely fruits will be found. Hearts will be knit together; earthly things will be surrendered; personal interests will be merged. It is not a question of throwing our goods into a common

heap, but of the grace which once took that special form, and which at all times would lead us, not merely to surrender our possessions, but ourselves, for the good of others.

It is a very grave mistake indeed for any one to say, or to think, that because we are not in Pentecostal times we cannot count on the presence of God with us in the path of holy obedience to His will. Such a thought should be judged as sheer unbelief. We are certainly shorn of many of the Pentecostal gifts, but we are not bereft of the Giver. The blessed Comforter abides with us; and it is our happy privilege to be in a position in which we can enjoy His presence and ministry.

The thing is *to be* in that position; not merely to *say* we are in it, to boast of being in it, but *really* to be in it. We may well apply here the pointed question of the blessed apostle, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say" he is on divine ground, if he be not really there? Assuredly it profits nothing.

But let us not forget that although we are not in Acts 2, but in the Second Epistle to Timothy; although we are not in the refreshing scenes of Pentecost, but in the "perilous times" of "the last days," yet the Lord is with those "who call on Him out of a pure heart," and His presence is all we want. Let us only trust Him, use Him, lean upon Him. Let us see to it that we are in a position in which we can count on His presence — a position of entire separation from all that He judges to be "iniquity" — from the "dishonourable vessels" in "the great house," and from all those who, having a form of godliness, deny the power thereof.

These, we may rest assured, are the absolutely essential conditions on which the Divine Presence can be realized by any company of Christians. We may come together, and form ourselves into an assembly; we may profess to be on divine ground; we may call ourselves the assembly of God; we may appropriate to ourselves all those passages of Scripture which only apply to those who are really gathered by the Holy Ghost in the name of Jesus; but if the essential conditions are not there; if we are not "calling on the Lord out of a pure heart"; if we are mixed up with "iniquity"; if we are associated with "dishonourable vessels"; if we are walking hand in

hand with lifeless professors who deny in practice the power of godliness — what then? Can we expect to realize the Lord's presence? As well might Israel have expected it with Achan in the camp. It cannot be. In order to reach divine results, there must be divine conditions. To look for the former without the latter is vanity, folly, and wicked presumption.

We are not now treating, or even touching, the great question of the soul's salvation. This, precious and important as it is to all whom it may concern, is not at all our subject in this series of papers on "Jericho and Achor." We are dealing with the solemn and weighty question of the privilege and responsibility of those who profess to be the Lord's people, gathered to His name; and we are specially anxious to impress upon the mind of the reader that, notwithstanding the hopeless ruin of the professing Church, its utter failure in its responsibility to Christ as His witness and light-bearer in the world, yet it is the happy privilege of "two or three" to be gathered in His name, apart from all the evil and error around, owning our common sin and failure, feeling our weakness, and looking to Him to be with us and bless us according to the unchangeable love of His heart.

Now, to those thus gathered, there is no limit whatever to the measure of blessing which our ever gracious and faithful Lord can bestow. "He has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars" — the fullness of spiritual power, ministerial gift and authority for His Church. Such is His style and title in addressing the church at Sardis, which, we believe, prophetically sets before us the history of Protestantism.

It is not said, as in the address to Ephesus, that He "holds the seven stars in His right hand." There is a grave difference as to this; and it is our bounden duty to recognize both the difference and the cause. When the Church began, on the day of Pentecost, and during the days of the apostles, Christ, the Head, not only *possessed* all spiritual gift, power and authority for His Church, but was owned as the *actual administrator* thereof. He held the stars in His right hand. There was no such thing known or thought of as human authority in the assembly of God. Christ was owned as Head and Lord. He had

received the gifts, and He dispensed them according to His sovereign will.

Thus it should ever be. But, alas, man has intruded upon the hallowed sphere of Christ's authority. He presumes to meddle in the appointment of ministry in the Church of God. Without so much as a single atom of divine authority, without any ability whatsoever to impart the necessary gift for ministry, he nevertheless takes upon himself the solemn responsibility of calling, appointing, or ordaining to the ministry in the Church of God. As well might the writer of these lines undertake to appoint a man as an admiral in Her Majesty's fleet, or a general in her army, as for any man, or body of men, to appoint a man to minister in the Church of God. It is a daring usurpation of divine authority. None can impart ministerial gift, and none can appoint to any branch of the ministry but Christ, the Church's Head and Lord; and all who undertake to do so will have to account to Him for so doing.

It may be that many who thus act, and many more who sanction or are identified with such acting, are not aware of what they are doing; and our God is gracious and merciful in bearing with our feebleness and ignorance. All this is blessedly true; but as to the principle of human authority in the Church of God, it is utterly false, and should be rejected with holy decision by every one who loves, reverences and adores the great Head of the Church and Lord of the assembly, who, blessed be His name, still has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. He has them now just as positively as in apostolic times; and all who take their true place, the place of self-judgment and humiliation; all who are truly own our common sin and failure, our departure from first love, first principles; all who really, in true humility of mind, look to Christ alone for all they want; all who, in real earnestness of heart and godly sincerity, bow to His Word and confess His name — all such will assuredly prove the reality of His presence; they will find Him amply sufficient for all their need. They can count on Him for the supply of all ministerial gift, and for the maintenance of all godly order in their public reunions.

True, they will feel — must feel — that they are not in the days of Acts 2, but in the days of 2 Timothy. Yet Christ is sufficient

for these, as He was for those. The difficulties are great, but His resources are infinite. It were folly to deny that there are difficulties; but it is sinful unbelief to question the all-sufficiency of our ever-gracious and faithful Lord. He has promised to be with His people right on to the end. But He cannot sanction hollow pretension, or proud assumption. He looks for reality, for truth in the inward parts. He will have us in our right place, owning our true condition. There He can meet us according to His infinite fullness, and according to the eternal stability of that grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

But oh, let us never forget that our God delights in uprightness of heart and integrity of purpose. He will never fail a trusting heart; but He must be trusted really. It will not do to speak of trusting Him while in reality we are leaning on our own appliances and arrangements. Here is precisely where we so sadly fail. We do not leave room for Him to act in our midst. We do not leave the platform clear for Him. Thus we are robbed and that to an extent of which we have little idea, of the blessed manifestation of His presence and grace in our assemblies. His Spirit is quenched and hindered, and we are left to feel our barrenness and poverty, when we might be rejoicing in the fullness of His love and in the power of His ministry. It is utterly impossible that He can ever fail those who, owning the truth of the condition earnestly look to Him. He cannot deny Himself; and He can never say to His people that they have reckoned too largely on Him.

It is not that we are to look for any special display of power in our midst, anything that might attract public attention, or make a noise in the world. There are no tongues, no gifts of healing, no miracles, no extraordinary manifestations of angelic action on our behalf. Neither are we to look for anything similar to the case of Ananias and Sapphira — the sudden and awful execution of divine judgment, striking terror into the hearts of all, both inside and outside the assembly.

Such things are not to be looked for now. They would not comport with the present condition of things in the Church of God. No doubt our Lord Christ has all power in Heaven and on earth, and

He could display that power now just as He did in Pentecostal times, if it so pleased Him.

But He does not so act, and we can readily understand the reason. It is our place to walk softly, humbly, tenderly. We have sinned, and failed, and departed from the holy authority of the Word of God. We must ever bear this in mind, and be content with a very low and retired place. It would ill become us to seek a name or a position in the earth. We cannot possibly be too little in our own eyes.

But at the same time we can, if in our right place, and in a right spirit, fully count on the presence of Jesus with us; and we may rest assured that where He is — where His most gracious presence is felt — there we may look for the most precious results, both in the way of binding our hearts together in true brotherly love, in causing us to sit loose to all earthly possessions and earthly ties, in leading us forth in grace and kindness toward all men, and also in putting away from among us all who would defile the assembly by unsound doctrine or unholy morals.

P.S. — It is of the utmost importance for the Christian reader to bear in mind that, whatever be the condition of the professing Church, it is his privilege to enjoy as high communion and to tread as high a path of individual devotedness as ever was known in the very brightest days of the Church's history. We must never draw a plea from the condition of things around us for lowering the standard of individual holiness and devotedness. *There is no excuse for continuing a single hour in connection with anything that will not stand the test of Holy Scripture.*

True, we feel the condition of things — cannot but feel it: would we felt it more! But it is one thing to feel it, and go through it with Christ, and another thing to sink under it and go on with the evil, and give up in despair.

May the Lord, in His infinite grace, produce in the hearts of all His people a more profound and influential sense of their privileges and responsibilities, both individually and collectively, that thus there may be a truer and brighter testimony for His name, and a

devoted band of worshipers, workers and witnesses gathered out to wait for His coming!

Judges 6-8.

Gideon and his companions.

PART 1.

In studying the history of the nation of Israel, we notice two distinct eras, namely, the era of *unity*, and the era of *individuality* — the period in the which the twelve tribes acted as one man, and the period in the which one man was called to act for the twelve tribes. We may take the Book of Joshua as illustrating the former; and the Book of Judges as a sample of the latter. The most cursory reader cannot fail to discern the difference between these two books. The one is characterised by external power and glory; the other by weakness and failure. Power is stamped on the former, ruin on the latter. In that, Jehovah gives the land to Israel; in this, Israel fails to take the land from Jehovah.

Now, all this is expressed in the two words which may be regarded as the motto of the two books, namely, "Gilgal" and "Bochim." In the Book of Joshua we find the congregation always starting from Gilgal to prosecute the war, and returning thither to celebrate their victory. Gilgal was their centre, because there they were circumcised; and there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. See Joshua 5:9, 10.

But no sooner have we opened the Book of Judges than the eye rests upon the sad record, "An angel of the Lord came up from *Gilgal to Bochim*, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars; but ye have not obeyed my voice; why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place

Bochim, that is, weepers; and they sacrificed there unto the Lord." Judges 2:1-5.

Here, then, we have, very remarkably, the contrast between the two books of Joshua and Judges — the book of unity and the book of individuality — the book of external power and glory, and the book of internal weakness, failure, and ruin. Alas! alas! the glory speedily departed. Israel's national greatness soon faded away. "The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old.... And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim.... And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed."

This, truly, is a gloomy and humiliating record. Joshua's sword was sheathed. Those palmy days in the which he had led Israel's compact host to splendid victories over the kings of Canaan, were passed and gone. The moral influence of Joshua and of the elders that survived him had passed away, and the whole nation had rushed, with terrible avidity, into the gross moral evils and abominable idolatries of those nations whom they ought to have driven out from before them. In a word, the ruin was complete, so far as Israel was concerned. Like Adam, in the garden; and Noah, in the restored earth; so Israel, in the land of Canaan, utterly failed. Adam ate the forbidden fruit; Noah got drunk; and Israel bowed before the altars of Baal.

Thus much as to man. But, thank God, there is another side of the picture. There is what we may call a bright and beauteous "*Nevertheless*;" for God will be God, no matter what man may prove

himself to be. This is an unspeakable relief and consolation to the heart. God abideth faithful. Here is faith's stronghold, come what may. God is always to be counted upon, spite of all man's failure and shortcoming. His goodness and faithfulness form the resource and the refuge of the soul amid the darkest scenes of human history.

This soul-sustaining truth shines out with remarkable lustre in the very passage from which we have just given such a depressing quotation. "Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." But mark the following words, so illustrative of the individuality of the Book of Judges: "And when the Lord raised them up judges, then *the Lord was with the judge* and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies *all the days of the judge*: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them." Judges 2:16, 18.

In these last quoted words, we have the great root principle of the Book of Judges — the divine secret of the ministry of the Baraks, the Gideons, the Jephthas, and the Samsons, the record of whose ministry occupies so large a portion of this most interesting section of inspiration. Israel had failed — sadly, shamefully, inexcusably failed. They had forfeited all claims to the protection of Jehovah's shield. They were justly given over into the ruthless hands of the kings of Canaan. As to all this there could be no possible question. "Nevertheless" Jehovah's heart could feel for his poor, oppressed, and groaning Israel. True, they had proved themselves naughty and unworthy, yet His ear was ever ready to catch their very earliest groan; yea, we are even told, in Judges 10, that "his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel."

What touching words! What exquisite tenderness! What deep compassion! How such a statement lets us into the profound depths of the heart of God! The misery of His people moved the loving heart of Jehovah. The very faintest and earliest symptoms of brokenness and contrition, on the part of Israel, met with a ready and gracious response, on the part of Israel's God. It mattered not how far they had wandered, how deeply they had sunk, or how grievously they had sinned; God was ever ready to welcome the feeblest breathings of a broken heart. The springs of divine mercy

and compassion are absolutely inexhaustible. The ocean of His love is boundless and unfathomable; and hence, the very moment His people take the place of confession, He enters the place of forgiveness. He delights to pardon, according to the largeness of His heart, and according to the glory of His own Name. He finds His peculiar joy in blotting out transgressions, in healing, restoring, and blessing, in a manner worthy of Himself. This glorious truth shines in the history of Israel; it shines in the history of the church; and it shines in the history of every individual believer.

But it is high time we should turn to our immediate subject, namely, "Gideon and his companions," as presented in that portion of the Book of Judges given at the head of this paper. May the eternal Spirit unfold and apply its precious contents to our souls!

Judges 6 opens with a very sad and depressing record — a record only too characteristic of Israel's entire history: "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel; and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds." What a humiliating picture! What a reverse for the Israel of God! What a contrast to the conquering host that had crossed the Jordan and walked across the ruins of Jericho! How sad, how humbling, to think of Israel crouching and hiding in the dens and caves of the mountains, through terror of the uncircumcised Midianites!

It is well for us to gaze upon this picture, and ponder its salutary lesson. Israel's power and glory consisted simply in having the presence of God with them. Without that, they were as water spilt upon the ground. They were as the autumn leaf before the blast. But the divine presence could not be enjoyed in connection with allowed evil; and therefore, when Israel forgot their Lord, and wandered away from Him into the forbidden paths of idolatry, He had to recall them to their senses by stretching out His governmental rod, and causing them to feel the crushing power of one or another of the nations around.

Now all this has a voice and a lesson for us. So long as God's people walk with Him in holy obedience, they have nothing to fear. They are perfectly safe from the snares and assaults of all their spiritual foes. Nought can, by any means, harm them while they abide in the shelter of God's own presence. But, clearly, that presence demands and secures holiness. Unjudged evil cannot dwell there. To live in sin and talk of security — to attempt to connect the presence of God with sanctioned evil — is wickedness of the very deepest dye. No, it must not be!" God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." "Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever." If God's people forget these wholesome truths, He knows how to recall them to their remembrance by the rod of discipline, and, blessed for ever be His name, He loves them too well to spare that rod, however reluctant He may be to use it. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.*" Hebrews 12:6-12.

These are encouraging words for the people of God, at all times. The discipline may be — and no doubt is — painful; but when we know that a Father's hand is in it, and when we realise what His object is, we can pass through the trial with exercised hearts, and thus reap the peaceable fruits of righteousness. On the other hand, if we meet the discipline with an impatient spirit, a rebellious will, an unsubdued mind, we only render

it necessary for the pressure to be continued and augmented, for our loving Father will never let us alone. He will have us in holy subjection to Himself, cost what it may. He graciously takes our part against ourselves, subdues the proud risings of our will, and crushes all that in us which hinders our growth in holiness, grace, and divine knowledge.

Oh! what infinite grace shines in the fact that our God occupies Himself with our very failures and follies, our waywardness and wilfulness, our sins and shortcomings, in order to deliver us from them! He knows all about us. he understands and takes into account all our surroundings and all our inward tendencies, and He deals with us in infinite wisdom and perfect patience, keeping ever before Him that one gracious object, to make us partakers of His holiness, and — wondrous thought — to bring out in us the expression of His own nature and character. Surely, then, in the presence of such abounding grace and mercy, we may well "lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees."

PART 2

There is one truth which shines out with uncommon lustre in the Book of Judges, and that is, that God is ever to be counted upon, even amid the darkest scenes of human history; and, moreover, faith can always count upon God; God never fails a trusting heart No, never. He never has failed, never will, never can fail the individual soul that confides in Him, that takes hold of His precious word, in the artless simplicity of a faith that trusts Him in the face of man's deepest and most humiliating failure and shortcoming.

This is most consolatory and encouraging, at all times, and under all circumstances. True it is — alas! how true! man fails in everything. Trace him where you will; mark him in whatever sphere of action or responsibility he occupies, and it is the same sad tale, over and over again, of unfaithfulness, failure, and ruin. Let man be set up in business, as often as he may, with the largest capital and the fairest prospects, and he is sure to become a bankrupt. It has ever been so, from the days of Eden down to the present moment. We may assert, without fear of contradiction, that there has not been one solitary exception to the dismal rule, in the history of Adam's fallen

race. We must never forget this. True faith never forgets it, in its highest flights and brightest visions. It would be the blindest folly to attempt to ignore the fact that ruin is stamped, in characters deep and broad, upon the entire of man's story, from first to last.

But, in the face of all this, God abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself. Here is the resource and the resting-place of faith. It recognises and owns the ruin; but it counts on God. Faith is not blind to human failure; but it fixes its gaze on divine faithfulness. It confesses the ruin of man; but it counts on the resources of God.

Now, all this comes strikingly out in the interesting and instructive story of Gideon. He, truly, was made to realise, in his own person and experience, the fact of Israel's fallen condition. The contrast between Joshua and Gideon is as striking as anything can be, so far as regards the question of their condition and circumstances. Joshua could place his foot on the necks of the kings of Canaan. Gideon had to thrash his wheat in a corner to hide it from the Midianites. The day of Joshua was marked by splendid victories; the day of Gideon was a day of small things. But the day of small things for man is the day of great things for God. So Gideon found it. True, it was not permitted him to witness the sun and moon arrested in their course, or the cities of the uncircumcised levelled with the ground. His was a day of barley cakes and broken pitchers, not of astounding miracles and brilliant achievements. But God was with him; and this was enough. "There came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite; and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, *thou mighty man of valour*." Judges 6:11, 12.

What words were these to fall upon the ear of Gideon, cowering in the winepress, through fear of the enemy! They were words from heaven to lift his soul above the trials and sorrows, and humiliations of earth — words of divine power and virtue to infuse vigour into his depressed and sorrowing heart. "Thou mighty man of valour!" How hard was it for Gideon to take such wondrous accents in! How difficult to apply them to himself Where was the might or where was the valour? Most surely not in himself or in his surroundings.

Where then? In the living God; precisely where Joshua found his might and his valour. Indeed there is a striking similarity in the terms in which both these eminent servants of God were addressed. The similarity of the terms is quite as marked as is the contrast in their circumstances. Here are the terms to Joshua: "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage: be not thou afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." And what were the terms to Gideon? Even the very same — "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

Precious words! Soul-stirring, heart-strengthening accents! Words of light, life, and power! And yet Gideon was slow to make his own of them — slow to grasp them, in the lovely appropriating power of faith, which so delights the heart of God, and glorifies His name. How often is it thus with us! How constantly we fail to rise to the height of God's gracious thoughts and purposes towards us! We are prone to reason about ourselves and our surroundings, instead of believing God, and resting, in sweet tranquillity, in His perfect love and infallible faithfulness.

Thus it was with that dear man of God on whose history we are dwelling. The divine statement was clear, full, absolute, and unconditional: "The Lord is with thee." There was no ground, in these words, for any question, doubt, or difficulty whatsoever; and yet mark Gideon's reply: "And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, *if* the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Verse 18.

Here, as is evident, Gideon reasons from his surroundings. Hence the "*if*" — that little monosyllable of unbelief. It is a familiar remark amongst us, "If you want to be miserable, look within; if you want to be distracted, look around; if you want to be peaceful and happy, look up — 'look off unto Jesus.'" This is most true. So surely as we become occupied with self, or with men and things, the circumstances which surround us, we must be unhinged and unhappy. Our only strength, our only comfort, our only light, is to keep the eye of faith fixed on Jesus, and the heart firmly centred in

Him. Most certainly Gideon's surroundings were of the gloomiest character. His "sensible horizon" was overhung with dark and heavy clouds. But there was one bright and blessed ray which shone in upon his depressed spirit — a ray emanating from the very heart of God, and conveyed in that one brief but comprehensive sentence, "The Lord is with thee." There was no "if" in this — no doubt, no difficulty, no reserve, no condition. It was distinct and unqualified, and needed only one thing to make it a spring of joy, strength, and victory in Gideon's soul, and that was to mix it with faith. But then "if" is not faith. True faith never answers God with ifs, for the simplest of all reasons, that it looks only at God, and there are no ifs with Him. Faith reasons from God downwards; not from man upwards. Faith has only one difficulty, and that difficulty is embodied in the question, "How shall he *not*?" It never says, "How shall he?" This is the language of sheer unbelief.

But, it may be asked by some, was there not some foundation for Gideon's "if" and "why?" Certainly not in God or in His word, whatever there had been in Israel and their actings. No doubt, if Gideon had only cast his eye back over the pages of his national history, he might have discovered ample reason for the sad and humiliating condition in which he found himself. Those blotted pages would have furnished an abundant answer to his question, "Why then is all this befallen us?" But had Israel's actings dimmed the lustre of Jehovah's mighty "miracles?" Not in the vision of faith, most surely. God had done great and glorious things for His people; and the record of those doings lay ever under the eye of faith, in all its soul-sustaining virtue. No doubt Israel had failed — shamefully failed; and the record of that failure lay also under the eye of faith, and furnished a solemn answer to Gideon's inquiry, "Why is all this befallen us?" Faith recognises God's government as well as His grace, and moreover it bows, in solemn awe, before each stroke of His governmental rod.

It is well to keep all this in mind. We are apt to forget it. God has, at times, to stretch forth his hand and lift the rod of authority. He cannot own what is contrary to His name and His nature. Now, Gideon needed to remember this. Israel had sinned, and this was the

reason why they were under the rod, of which the power of the Midianites was the expression in Gideon's day.

Gideon, we repeat, was called to enter practically into the meaning of all this; and not only so, but to taste the reality of identification with his people in all their pressure and affliction. This latter, as we know, was the portion and experience of every true servant of God in Israel. All had to pass through those deep exercises of soul consequent upon their association with the people of God. It mattered not whether it were a judge, a prophet, a priest, or a king; all had to participate in the sorrows and trials of the nation of Israel; nor could any true heart — any genuine lover of God or His people — desire exemption from such deep and holy exercises. This was pre-eminently true of the only perfect Servant that ever stood upon this earth. He, though personally exempt from all the consequences of Israel's sin and failure — though pure and spotless, divinely holy in nature and in life — did nevertheless, in perfect grace, voluntarily identify Himself with the people in all their sorrow and humiliation. "In all their affliction he was afflicted." Thus it was with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ; and all who, in any degree, partook of His Spirit, had, according to their measure, to taste of the same cup, though none could ever come up to Him in this or in aught else.

But when we come to compare closely the angel's words to Gideon, with his reply, we notice a point of deep interest, and one which illustrates the individual character of the Book of Judges. The angel says, "The Lord is with *thee*." Gideon replies, "If the Lord be with *us*." This is very interesting and instructive; moreover it is in full keeping with a passage already referred to, in Judges 3: "And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord *was with the judge*" — it does not say, "with the people," but adds, with touching grace — "and *delivered them* out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them." Verse 18.

There is peculiar sweetness and beauty in this. If Jehovah had to hide His face from His people, and give them over, for the time, into the hand of the uncircumcised, yet His loving heart was ever turned towards them, and ever ready to mark and recognise the faintest

traces of a repentant spirit. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." Micah 7:18-20.

PART 3.

Nothing can be more encouraging to the heart than the mode in which the Lord deals with the soul of Gideon — the way in which He prepares him for the course of action to which He was calling him. Gideon, like ourselves, was full of "ifs" and "whys," those little words so big with unbelief. The poor human heart is ever slow to take in the magnificence of divine grace; our feeble vision is dazzled by the brilliancy of divine revelation. It is only artless faith which can cause the soul to feel perfectly at home in the presence of the richest unfoldings of the goodness and loving-kindness of God. Faith never says "if" or "why?" It believes what God says, because He says it. It rests, in sweet tranquillity, upon every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord. Unbelief looks at circumstances, and reasons from them. Faith looks at God, and reasons from Him. Hence the vast difference in their conclusions. Gideon, judging from his surroundings, concluded that Jehovah had forsaken His people. A simple faith would have led him to the very opposite conclusion; it would have enabled him to see and know and remember that Jehovah would ever be true to His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, however He might, in His governmental dealings, have to hide His face from their rebellious and sinful offspring. Faith always counts on God; and God, blessed be His name, ever honours faith. He first creates it, and then owns it.

But, not only does God graciously honour faith; He rebukes our fears. He rises above our unbelief, and hushes all our silly reasonings. Thus, in His dealings with His chosen servant Gideon, it would seem as though He heard not the "if" or the "why?" He goes on to unfold His own thoughts, to display His own resources, and to fill the soul of His servant with a confidence and a courage which

were to lift him above all the depressing influences with which he was surrounded.

"And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel out of the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Here we have the true secret of strength: "The Lord looked upon him." There was divine power in this look, if Gideon could only have taken it in. But alas! he was still full of questions. "And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Thus it is ever. Unbelief turns the eye in upon self, or out upon our surroundings. It leads us to compare our visible resources with the work to which God is calling us. Jehovah had said, "Go in this thy might." What was the "might?" In what did it consist? Was it great wealth, lofty position, or great physical power? Nothing of the kind. "Jehovah looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel." This was absolute and unqualified. It left no room for Gideon's "wherewith?" It made it very plain that the might with which he was to deliver Israel was not in himself or in his father's house, but in the God of Israel. It mattered little whether his family was rich or poor; whether he was little or great. It was God who was about to use him. What was wealth or greatness to Him? He could use a barley cake or a broken pitcher. Indeed we may observe this special feature in the varied instruments taken up in the Book of Judges, namely, that "no flesh shall glory in God's presence." How does human glory fade away before the humiliating fact that Israel's hosts were called forth to battle under the leadership of a woman! What a stain on human pride in the fact of deliverance coming through the agency of a "left-handed man!"

But, on the other hand, we find that, just in proportion as man's glory fades away, the divine glory shines out. The humbler the instrument, the more we see the power of God. What difference does it make to the Almighty God whether His instrument be left-handed or right-handed — a man or a woman — a dwarf or a giant? The instrument is nothing. God is all in all. True, He deigns to use instruments; but all the power is His, and His shall be the eternal and universal praise. Gideon had to learn this; and so had Moses; and so

have we all. It is an invaluable lesson. We are all so prone to think of *our* competency for any work or service which may lie before us, when we ought to remember that the works that are done upon the earth, God is the doer of them. Our sufficiency is of Him. We can do nothing; and if we could do aught it would be badly done. The human finger can only leave a soil behind. The works of men perish like their thoughts. The work of God abideth for ever. Let us remember these things, that we may walk humbly and lean ever and only on the mighty arm of the living God. Thus the soul is kept in a well-balanced condition, free from self-confidence and fleshly excitement, on the one hand; and from gloom and depression, on the other. If we can do nothing, self-confidence is the height of presumption. If God can do everything, despondency is the height of folly.

But in the case of Gideon, as in that of all God's servants, we observe two things worthy of our deepest attention. In the first place, we have the divine commission, as embodied in those weighty words, "*Have not I sent thee?*" And in the second place, we have the assurance of the divine presence, as set forth in these encouraging words, "*Surely I will be with thee.*"

These are the two grand points for all who will serve God in their day and generation. They must know that the path they tread has been marked out distinctly by the hand of God; and, furthermore, they must have the sense of His presence with them along the path. These things are absolutely essential. Without them we shall waver and vacillate. We shall be running from one line of work to another. We shall take up certain work, go on with it for a while, and then abandon it for something else. We shall work by fits and starts; our course will be faltering, our light flickering: "Unstable as water, we shall not excel." We shall never succeed at anything. There will be no certainty, no stability, no progress.

These are weighty matters for all of us. It is of immense importance for every servant of Christ, every child of God, to know that he is at his divinely appointed post, and at his divinely given work. This will give fixedness of purpose, moral elevation, and holy independence. It will preserve us from being tossed about by human thoughts and opinions — being influenced by the judgment of one

or another. It is our happy privilege to be so sure that we are doing the very work which the Master has given us to do, that the thoughts of our fellows respecting us shall have no more weight with us than the pattering of rain on the window.

Not — be it carefully observed — that we should, for a moment, countenance, much less cultivate, a spirit of haughty independence. Far away be the thought! We, as Christians, can never, in one sense, be independent one of another, How can we, seeing we are members one of another? We are united to one another and to our risen Head in glory, by the one Spirit who is with us and in us. The most intense individuality — and our individuality should be as intense as our unity is indissoluble — can never touch the precious truth of the one body and one Spirit.

All this is divinely true, and most fully and thankfully owned. But, at the same time, we must insist upon the truth of our individuality, and of our personal responsibility. This must be maintained with all possible energy and decision. Each servant has to do with his Lord, in that particular sphere of work to which he has been called. And, moreover, each should know his work, and give himself to it diligently and constantly. He should possess the holy certainty and authority imparted to the soul by that divine and powerful sentence, "Have not I sent thee?"

It will, perhaps, be said, "We are not all Gideons or Joshuas. We are not all called to occupy such a prominent place or tread such a brilliant path as those illustrious servants." True; but we are called to serve; and it is essential to every servant to know his commission, to understand his work, and to be fully assured in his own soul that he is doing the very work which the Lord has given him to do, and treading the very path which the hand of God has marked out for him. If there be any uncertainty as to this, we do not see how there can be any progress.

But there is more than this. It is not enough to know that we are treading the divinely appointed path. We want to realise the divine presence. We want to have the precious words made good in our experience, "Surely I will be with thee." This completes the servant's equipment. The divine commission and the divine presence are all

we want; but we must have these in order to get on. With these priceless realities it matters not who we are, what we are, or where we are. The Lord can use a feeble woman, a left-handed man, a cake of barley meal, or a broken pitcher. The instrument is nothing. God is the workman. Unbelief may cry out, "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold my family is *poor* in Manasseh, and I am the *least* in my father's house." Faith can cry out, in reply, "What of all this if God be for us? Does He want the rich or the noble? What are riches or greatness to Him? Nothing." "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

These are wholesome words for all of us. It is an unspeakable mercy for every dear servant of Christ to be kept in the abiding sense of his own utter nothingness — to be taught to realise, in some measure, the depth, fulness, and power of that one brief but most comprehensive statement, "Apart from me ye can do nothing." There is not a single branch in all the vine, however imposing or wide-spreading it may seem to be, which, if separated from the parent stem by the thickness of a gold leaf, can produce the very smallest atom of fruit. There must be the abiding realisation of our vital union with Christ the practical, living, abiding in Him, by faith, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, in order to bring forth any fruit that God can accept. It is as we abide in Christ that the living sap circulates freely through us, and gives forth the healthy bud, the green leaf, and the seasonable fruit.

Here lies the grand secret of power. It is abiding in the living vine. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river; and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the

year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Jeremiah 17:7, 8.

All this is intensely personal. We must each, for himself and herself, cling, by faith, to Christ. It is of the very last possible importance for Christians to bear in mind that Christianity is a thoroughly individual thing. We are individual in our repentance, in our faith, in our salvation, in our communion, in our service, and in our reward. Look at the addresses to the seven churches in Revelation 2 & 3. Harken to those pointed words, "*He* that hath an ear" — "*To him* that overcometh." What do they mean? Do they not set forth, in the most distinct and forcible manner, that blessed individuality of which we speak? Unquestionably. But do they touch unity? Not in the smallest degree. They leave its sacred domain wholly untouched." There is one body and one Spirit." This must ever hold good, spite of all the ruin and failure of the professing church. Nevertheless, the writings of John are pre-eminently individual. From the opening lines of his Gospel to the closing sentence of his Apocalypse, we trace this feature. He shows us the Philips, the Simons, the Andrews, and the Nathanaels coming, in their individuality, to Jesus. He tells us of a Jewish ruler here, and a Samaritan sinner there, who were drawn by the Father to Jesus. He tells us of the good Shepherd who calleth His sheep by name he tells us of the branches clinging to the living vine. Thus it is in John's Gospel; and when we turn to his Epistles, we find the same principle running through them all. He writes to an elect lady, and to his beloved Gaius; and if he once speaks of "the church," it is but to weep over its departed glory, and to raise amid its ruins that warning note for individual ears, "*Look to yourselves.*" And as to the Revelation, it ends as it begins, with a solemn appeal "*to him that Heareth.*"

PART 4.

The more closely we study the narrative of the Lord's dealings with Gideon, the more we must be struck with the marvellous way in which He prepares him for his after course. Like all God's servants, in all ages, Gideon had to undergo a course of secret training and discipline, ere he was fit to appear in public. The space of time occupied in this training may vary, as may also the character of the

discipline; but of this we may rest assured that all who will be used of God in public must be taught of God in private. It is a fatal mistake for any one to rush into prominence without proper equipment, and that equipment can only be attained in the secret of the divine presence. It is in profound and hallowed retirement with God that vessels are filled and instruments fitted for His work.

Let us never forget this. Moses had to spend forty years at "the back side of the desert" ere he was fit to enter upon his public career. David had to feed his father's flock, ere he was called to rule the nation of Israel. He slew a lion and a bear in secret, ere he was called to slay Goliath in public. The great apostle of the Gentiles spent three years in Arabia, notwithstanding his very remarkable conversion and call. The apostles spent three years and a half in companionship with their Master, and then had to tarry until they were endued with power from on high. Thus it has been with all those who have ever been called to occupy a prominent place in the Lord's work; and even the blessed Master Himself — though surely needing no training or discipline, inasmuch as He was ever perfect — to set us an example, spent thirty years in retirement ere He came forth in public.

All this is full of most wholesome instruction for our souls. Let us seek to take it in and profit by it. No one can ever get on in public work without this private teaching in the school of Christ. It is this which gives depth, solidity, and mellowness to the character. It imparts a tone of reality and a fixedness of purpose most desirable in all who engage in any department of the Lord's work. It will invariably be found that where anyone goes to work without this divine preparation, there is shallowness and instability. There may perhaps, for a time, be more flash and show in those superficial characters than in those who have been educated in the school of Christ: but it never lasts. It may create a momentary sensation, but it soon passes away like the morning cloud or the early dew. Nothing will stand but that which is the direct result of private communion with God — secret training in His presence — the excellent discipline of the school of God.

Let us see how all this is exemplified in Gideon's case. It is very evident that this honoured servant was called to pass through deep

exercises of soul before ever he took a single step in public action, yea before he ever unfurled the standard of testimony in his father's house. He had to begin with himself, with his own personal condition, with his own heart. Those who will be used for others must begin with themselves. So Gideon found it. Let us pursue his history.

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry till thou come again. And Gideon went in and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour; the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die." Judges 6:16-23.

Here we reach a profoundly interesting stage of Gideon's preparatory course. He is called to enter practically and experimentally into the great and universal law for the servants of God, namely, "When I am weak, then I am strong." This is a most precious law, and one which forms an indispensable element in the education of all Christ's servants. Let no one imagine that he can ever be used in the Lord's work, or ever make progress in the divine life, without some measure of real entrance into this invaluable principle. We hold it to be absolutely essential in forming the character of the true servant of Christ. Where it is not known, where it has not been felt, where it has not been, to some extent, realised, there is sure to be unsubduedness, unbrokenness, self-occupation, in

some form or another. There will be more or less of self-confidence, and various points and angles turning up, here and there, and acting as a sad hindrance to all that is good, useful, and holy.

On the other hand, when one has learnt that great family motto quoted above — when one has learnt, in the divine presence to say, "When I am weak, then I am strong" — when nature has been weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, there you will always find a measure of brokenness, softness, and tenderness of spirit; and not only so, but also largeness of heart, and readiness for every good work, and that lovely elasticity of mind which enables one to rise above all those petty selfish considerations which so sadly hinder the work of God. In short, the heart must first be broken, then made whole; and, being made whole, be undividedly given to Christ and to His blessed service. It is impossible to run the eye along the brilliant array of Christ's workmen, and not see the truth of this. Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, in Old Testament times; and Peter, Paul, and John, in those of the New, all stand before us as vivid illustrations of the value of broken material. All those beloved and honoured servants had to be broken in order to be made whole — to be emptied in order to be filled — to learn that, of themselves, they could do nothing, in order to be ready, in Christ's strength, for anything and everything.

Such is the law of the household — the law of the vineyard — the law of the kingdom. So Gideon found it in his day. His "alas!" was followed by Jehovah's "Peace; fear not," and then he was ready to begin. He had been brought face to face with the angel of God, and there he learnt not only that his family was poor in Manasseh, and he the least in his father's house, but that in himself he was perfectly powerless, and that all his springs must be found in the living God. Priceless lesson this, for the son of Joash, and for us all! a lesson not to be learnt in the schools and colleges of this world, but only in the deep and holy retirement of the sanctuary of God.

And now let us see what was Gideon's first act after his fears were hushed, and his soul filled with divine peace. His very first act was to build an altar. "Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." He takes the happy place of a worshipper, and

his worship is characterised by the revelation of the divine character. He calls his altar by that precious title, "The Lord send peace." He had gone through many and deep exercises of soul-exercises which none can know save those who are called out into a prominent place amongst God's people. He felt the ruin and the weakness of all around him. He felt the fallen and humiliating condition of his beloved people. He felt his own littleness, yea his own emptiness and nothingness. How could he come forward? How could he smite the Midianites? How could he save Israel? Who was sufficient for these things? It is all very well for those persons who live an easy, irresponsible kind of life; who know not the toils, the cares, and anxieties connected with the public service of Christ and the testimony for His name in an evil day. These know nothing of Gideon's painful exercises of soul; nothing of the pressure upon his spirit as he looked forth from beneath the shade of his father's oak tree, and contemplated the dangers and responsibilities of the battlefield. They can enter but feebly into the meaning of those words of one high up in the school of Christ, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead."

These are weighty words for all Christ's servants; but we must be His servants in reality, in order to enter into their deep significance. If we are content to live a life of indolence and ease, a life of self-seeking and self-pleasing, it is impossible for us to understand such words, or indeed to enter into any of those intense exercises of soul through which Christ's true-hearted servants and faithful witnesses, in all ages, have been called to pass. We invariably find that all those who have been most used of God in public have gone through deep waters in secret. It is as the sentence of death is written practically upon *self*, that the power of resurrection life in Christ shines out. Thus Paul could say to the Corinthians, "Death worketh in us; but life in you." Marvellous words! Words which let us into the profound depths of the apostle's ministry. What a ministry must that have been which was carried on upon such a principle as this! What power! what energy!

Death working in the poor earthen vessel, but streams of life, heavenly grace, and spiritual power flowing into those to whom he ministered.

This, reader, we may depend upon it, is the true secret of all effective ministry. It is an easy matter to talk about ministry; to set up to be ministers of Christ; but oh! how has the professing church departed from the divine reality of ministry! Alas! the heart sinks at the bare thought of it. Where are the Pauls, the Gideons, and the Joshuas? Where are the deep heart searchings and profound soul exercises which have characterised Christ's servants in other days? We are flippant and wordy, shallow and empty, self-sufficient and self-indulgent. Need we wonder at the small results? How can we expect to see life working in others when we know so little about death working in us?

May the eternal Spirit stir us all up, and work in us a more powerful sense of what it is to be the true-hearted, single-eyed, devoted servants of Jesus Christ!

PART 5.

We are now to contemplate Gideon called forth into action. He has received his commission from Jehovah. His questions have been answered, his fears hushed, his heart tranquillised, and he is enabled to build an altar. All this had reference to his own personal condition, to the state of his own soul, to the attitude of his own heart as in the sight of God.

Thus it must ever be. We must all begin in this way, if we are ever to be used of God to act on others. We must have to do with God in the secret of our own souls, else we shall prove to be but sorry workmen in the sequel. All who go forth in public work, without this secret training, are sure to prove flimsy and shallow. Self must be measured in the divine presence. We must learn that nature is of no account in the Lord's work. "Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zechariah 4:6.

It was not until Gideon had gone through somewhat of this holy discipline in secret that he was led out into service. And let us

carefully note where he had to commence. "It came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old" — for Jehovah knew how many bullocks Joash had, and the age of each — "and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it. And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down."

Here we see that Gideon had to begin *at home*. He was called to unfurl the standard of testimony in the very bosom of his family — in the very centre of his father's house. This is intensely interesting, and deeply practical. It teaches a lesson to which we should all bend our ears and apply our hearts. Testimony must begin at home. It will never do to rush forth into public work while our private and domestic ways are anything but what they ought to be. It is useless to set about throwing down the altar of Baal in public, while the selfsame altar remains standing at home.

This is of the very last possible importance. We are all of us imperatively called upon to show piety at home. Nothing is more sorrowful than to meet with persons who, abroad amongst their fellow men or their fellow Christians, are marked by a high tone of spirituality — a style of speaking which would lead one to suppose them far beyond the ordinary level of Christians, and yet when you come to close quarters with them — when you become acquainted with their private life and ways, their actual history from day to day, you find them very far indeed from bearing testimony for Christ to those with whom they come in contact. This is most deplorable. It dishonours the Lord Jesus, grieves the Spirit, stumbles and repulses young believers, gives occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully, and to our brethren to speak doubtfully, of us. Surely these things ought not to be. There ought to be a testimony yielded at home. Those who see most of us should see most of Christ in us. Those who know us best ought best to know that we are Christ's. But alas! how often is it otherwise! How often does it happen that the home circle is just the place where we least exhibit the lovely traits of Christian character! The wife or the husband, the parent or the child,

the brother or the sister, the master or the servant, the fellow servant or some other companion in daily life, is just the one in whose sight we least display the beauteous fruits of divine life. It is in private life that all our weak points come out — our oddities and peculiarities, our silly tendencies and sinful tempers: instead of which it ought to be in that very sphere that the grace of Jesus is most faithfully manifested.

Christian reader, let us not turn away from the word of reproof, of admonition, or exhortation. It may not be pleasant; but, we may rest assured it is salutary. It may not be agreeable to the flesh; but it is wholesome to the soul. We are called, like Gideon, to begin at home, if we would prove helpful to our brethren, or act effectively against the common foe.

No doubt, there are difficulties involved in this home testimony. It is often very hard, for example, for a child to bear witness against the worldliness of a parent, or of the whole family; but where there is humility of mind and simple dependence upon God, He maintains and carries us through marvellously. One thing is certain, there is nothing like decision. "The first blow is half the battle," yea, the whole battle is often gained by a single blow, when that blow is dealt in full communion with the mind of Christ.

On the other hand, where there is weakness and vacillation — playing fast and loose with the truth of God, trifling with divine principles and one's own conscience, a looking at consequences and a weighing of probable results — there the enemy is sure to have the upper hand, and the testimony altogether fails. God acts with those who act for Him. This is the grand secret of their success; but where the eye is not single, there is no real progress, no divine result.

Here is where so many of us signally fail. We are not whole hearted, not decided, not thoroughly out — and out for Christ. Hence there is no result for God, no action on others. We have no idea of what may be accomplished by a single devoted heart, one earnest and energetic soul. Such an one may be used to raise up a standard round which thousands will flock who might never have had the courage or energy to unfurl the standard themselves.

Look at Gideon. See how he wrought for God, and how God wrought with him. "Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him; and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night. And when the men of the city rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die; because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it."

This is what we may call striking at the very root of the matter. The worship of Baal is completely overturned. This was no trifle. We have little idea of what it cost the son of Joash to do this thing; but, by the grace of God, he did it. True it may have been with fear and trembling, still he did it. He dealt one vigorous blow at the entire system of Baal, and it crumbled into dust beneath his feet. No half measures would have availed. It would have been of no possible use to pick a stone, here and there, out of the idol's altar; the whole fabric had to be overturned from its very foundation, and the idol itself degraded in the very presence of its deluded worshippers. A bold decisive stroke was needed, and that stroke was given by the hand of Gideon the son of Joash, God's "mighty man of valour."

There is nothing, we repeat, like plain decision — bold, uncompromising faithfulness for Christ, cost what it may. Had Gideon been less decided, had his line of action been less thorough, his father Joash would not have been so perfectly won over. It needed just such a method of dealing with Baal to convince a rational person that the worship of such a god was a sham and a falsehood. "And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? *will ye save him?* he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar."

This was very simple reasoning, "If he be a god, let him plead for himself." Gideon's decided course had brought matters to a point. Baal was either a reality or a most complete delusion. If the former, let him plead for himself. If the latter, who would think of pleading for him? Nothing could be simpler. Gideon's action was a complete success. The worship of Baal was overturned; and the worship of Jehovah Elohim set up instead.

Thus we see that the divine work in the soul of Gideon is making very rapid but very real progress. He is conducted from strength to strength. How little idea had he, when first the divine voice fell on his ear, that, in so short a time, he would take so bold a step. If anyone had said to him, then, "In a few hours you will overturn the worship of Baal in the very midst of your father's house," he would not have believed it. But the Lord led him along, step by step, gently yet firmly; and as the heavenly light broke in upon his soul his confidence and courage grew.

Thus it is the Lord ever deals with His servants. He does not expect them to run before they have learnt to walk; but where the heart is true, and the purpose honest and firm, He graciously supplies the needed strength, moment by moment. He causes mountains of difficulty to remove, rolls away many a dark and heavy cloud, fortifies the heart, and girds up the loins of the mind, so that the very feeblest are armed with giant strength, and the coward heart filled with wonder, love, and praise at the triumph of divine grace.

All this is illustrated with great vividness in Gideon's interesting story. No sooner had he levelled Baal's altar, than he was called to encounter Midian's hosts. "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, and Abi-ezer was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also was gathered after him; and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them."

In short there was a thorough awakening. The tide of spiritual energy rose majestically, and bore hundreds and thousands upon its bosom. The work which had begun in Gideon's heart was extending itself far and wide, throughout the length and breadth of the land. The Spirit of the Lord was displaying His mighty energy, and multitudes were stirred up to gather round the standard which the hand of faith had unfurled.

But just at this point, it would seem that Gideon's faith needed fresh confirmation. It may be his spirit was overawed when he saw the mighty host of the uncircumcised mustering before him; and then, for a moment, his courage failed, and his heart craved a fresh sign from the Lord. "And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, *as thou hast said*" — alas! the poor heart can place its unbelieving "if" right in front of the word of God who cannot lie — "behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and if it be dry upon all the earth beside, *then shall I know* that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, *as thou hast said*."

How marvellous! And yet we need not marvel if we know aught of our own hearts. Anything for the poor human heart but the naked word of the living God. A sign, a token, something that the eye can see. The word of God is not enough for unbelieving nature.

But oh! the matchless grace of God! His unupbraiding love! His tender considerateness! He graciously meets the weakness of His poor servant, for "It was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, *a bowlfull of water*." What condescending grace! Instead of severely rebuking Gideon's unbelieving "if," He graciously confirms his wavering faith by superabounding evidence.

And yet all this sufficed not. Gideon seeks still further confirmation. "And he said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once. Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew upon all the ground." Such is the abounding grace and exhaustless patience of

the God with whom we have to do. For ever adored be His holy name! Who would not trust Him, and love Him, and serve Him?

PART 6.

We shall now ask the reader to open his Bible at Judges 7. Here Gideon's companions are brought before us; and their history, as well as that of their leader, is full of interest and profit for us. They had to be trained and tested as well as he. Let us ponder the narrative.

"Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."

The clear and soul-stirring blast of Gideon's trumpet had drawn around him a very large and imposing company; but this company had to be tested. It is one thing to be moved by the zeal and energy of some earnest servant of Christ, and it is quite another thing to possess those moral qualities which alone can fit a man to be an earnest servant himself. There is a vast difference between following in the wake of some devoted man of God, and walking with God ourselves — being propped up and led on by the faith and energy of another, and leaning upon God in the power of individual faith for ourselves.

This is a serious consideration for all of us. There is always great danger of our being mere imitators of other people's faith; of copying their example without their spiritual power; of adopting their peculiar line of things without their personal communion. All this must be carefully guarded against. We specially warn the young Christian reader against it. Let us be simple, and humble, and real. We may be very small, our sphere very narrow, our path very retired; but it does not matter in the least, provided we are precisely what grace has made us, and occupying the sphere in which our blessed Master has set us, and treading the path which He has

opened before us. It is by no means absolutely necessary that we should be great, or prominent, or showy, or noisy in the world; but it is absolutely necessary that we should be real and humble, obedient and dependent. Thus our God can use us, without fear of our vaunting ourselves; and then, too, we are safe, peaceful, and happy. There is nothing more delightful to the true Christian, the genuine servant of Christ, than to find himself in that quiet, humble, shady path where *self* is lost sight of, and the precious light of God's countenance enjoyed — where the thoughts of men are of small account, and the sweet approval of Christ is everything to the soul.

Flesh cannot be trusted. It will turn the very service of Christ into an occasion of self-exaltation. It will use the very name of him who made Himself nothing in order to make itself something. It will build up its own reputation by seeming to further the cause of Him who made Himself of none. Such is flesh! Such are we in ourselves! silly, self-exalting creatures, ever ready to vaunt ourselves, while professing to be nothing in ourselves, and to deserve nothing but the flames of an everlasting hell.

Need we marvel at the testing and proving of Gideon's companions? All must be tested and proved. The service of Christ is a very solemn and a very holy thing; and all who take part therein must be self ; judged, self-distrusting, and self-emptied; and not only so, but they must lean, with unshaken confidence, upon the living God, These are the grand qualities that go to make up the character of the true servant of Christ, and they are strikingly illustrated on the page of inspiration which now lies open before us.

Let us proceed with the narrative.

"The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands...Now, therefore, go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand."

Here the first grand test is applied to Gideon's host — a test designed to bring out the measure of the heart's simple confidence in

Jehovah. A coward heart will not do for the day of battle; a doubting spirit will not stand in the conflict. The same principle is set forth in Deuteronomy 20:8: "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

Faint heartedness is terribly contagious. It spreads rapidly. It withers the arm that should bear the shield, and paralyses the hand that should wield the sword. The only cure for this malady is simple confidence in God, a firm grasp of His faithfulness, a child-like trust in His word, true personal acquaintance with Himself. We must know God for ourselves, in such a way that His word is everything to us, and that we can walk alone with Him, and stand alone with Him in the darkest hour.

Reader, is it thus with thee? Hast thou this blessed confidence in God — this solid hold of His word? Hast thou, deep down in thy heart, such an experimental knowledge of God and His Christ as shall sustain thee even though thou hadst not the support or sympathy of another believer under the sun? Art thou prepared to walk alone in the world?

These are weighty questions, and we feel the need of pressing them upon the church of God at the present moment. There is a wide diffusion of the precious truth of God, and numbers are getting hold of it. Like the blast of Gideon's trumpet, so the clear testimony which has gone forth within the last few years has attracted many; and while we quite feel that there is real ground for thankfulness in this, we also feel that there is ground for very serious reflection indeed. Truth is a most precious thing, if it be truthfully found: and truthfully held: but let us remember that in exact proportion to the preciousness of the truth of God is the moral danger of trafficking therein without a self judged heart and an exercised conscience. What we really need is faith — unfeigned, earnest, simple, faith, which connects the soul, in living power, with God, and enables us to overcome all the difficulties and discouragements of the way. Of this faith there can be no imitation. We must either possess it in reality or not at all. A sham faith will speedily come to the ground. The man who attempts to walk by faith, if he have it not must

speedily totter and fall. We cannot face the hosts of Midian unless we have full confidence in the living God. "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return." Thus it must ever be. None can go to battle save those who are braced up by a faith that grasps the unseen realities of eternity, and endures as seeing Him who is invisible. May this faith be ours, in larger measure, beloved reader.

It is full of instruction for the heart to notice the effect of the first test upon the host of Gideon. It thinned his ranks amazingly. "There returned of the people twenty and two thousand, and there remained ten thousand." This was a serious reduction. But it is far better to have ten thousand that can trust God than ten thousand times ten thousand who cannot. What avails a vast mass of unbelieving flesh? Nothing. Of what use are numbers, if they be not energised by a living faith? None whatever. It is comparatively easy to flock around a standard raised by a vigorous hand; but it is a totally different thing to stand, in personal energy, in the actual battle. Nought but genuine faith can do this; and hence when the searching question is put "Who can trust God?" the showy ranks of profession are speedily thinned.

But there was yet another test for Gideon's companions. "And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place." Judges 7:4-7.

Here then we have another great moral quality which must ever characterise those who will act for God and for His people, in an evil day. They must not only have confidence in God, but they must

also be prepared to surrender self. This is a universal law in the service of Christ. If we want to swim in God's current, we must sink self; and we can only sink self in proportion as we trust Christ. Thus it stands ever. It is not, need we say, a question of salvation; it is a question of service. It is not a question of being a child of God, but of being a proper servant of Christ. The thirty-one thousand seven hundred that were dismissed from Gideon's army, were just as much Israelites as the three hundred that remained; but they were not fitted for the moment of conflict; they were not the right men for the crisis. And why? Was it that they were not circumcised? Nay. What then? They could not trust God and surrender self. They were full of fear when they ought to have been full of faith. They made refreshment their object instead of conflict.

Here, reader, lay the true and only secret of their moral unfitness. God cannot trust those who do not trust Him and sink self. This is pre-eminently solemn and practical. We live in a day of easy profession and self-indulgence. Knowledge can, now-a-days, be picked up at very small cost. Scraps of truth can be gathered, second hand, in all directions. Truth which cost some of God's dear servants years of deep soul ploughing and heart-searching exercise, is now in free circulation and can be intellectually seized and flippantly professed, by many who know not what soul ploughing or heart-exercise means.

But let us never forget — yea, let us constantly remember — that the life of faith is a reality; service is a reality; testimony for Christ, a reality. And further let us bear in mind that if we want to stand for Christ in an evil day — if we would be men for the crisis, genuine servants, true witnesses — then verily we must learn the true meaning of those two qualities, namely, confidence in God, and self-surrender.

PART 7.

There is something peculiarly striking in the fact that out of the many thousands of Israel, in the days of Gideon, there were only three hundred men who were really fit for conflict with the Midianites; only this small band fit for the occasion. This truly is a suggestive and admonitory fact. There were hundreds of thousands

of true Israelites — truly circumcised sons of Abraham — members of the congregation of the Lord, who were by no means up to the mark, when it was a question of war to the knife with Midian — a question of genuine confidence in God and self-surrender. We are safe in saying that the men who were morally fitted for the grand crisis in the day of battle were not one in a thousand. How solemn! Not one in a thousand who could trust God and deny self.

Christian reader, is not this something worthy of deep and serious thought? Does it not, very naturally, suggest the inquiry as to whether it is otherwise at this moment? Is it not painfully evident that we live in a day in the which little is known of the blessed secret of confidence in God, and still less of the exercise of self-surrender? In point of fact, these things can never be rightly separated. If we attempt to divorce self-surrender from confidence in God, it will land us in the deep and dark delusions of monasticism, asceticism, or ritualism. It will issue in nature trying to subdue nature. This, we need hardly say, is the direct opposite of Christianity. This latter starts with the glorious fact that the *old self* has been condemned and set aside by the cross of Christ, and therefore it can be practically surrendered, every day, by the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the meaning of those fine words in Colossians 3, "Ye *are* dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." He does not say, "Ye *ought to be* dead." No; but "ye *are* dead." What then? "Mortify your members which are on the earth." So also in the profound and precious teaching in Romans 6, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?" What then? "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here then lies the secret of all true surrender. If this be not understood and practically entered into, it will simply be *self* in one form trying to subdue *self* in another. This is a fatal delusion. It is a snare of the devil into which earnest souls are in imminent danger of falling, who sigh after holiness of life, but do not know the power of accomplished redemption, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost — are not built upon the solid foundation of Christianity.

We specially warn the reader against this deadly error. It distinctly savours of monasticism or asceticism. It clothes itself in the garb of pietism and sanctimoniousness, and is peculiarly attractive to a certain class of ardent spirits who long for victory over the lusts, passions, and tendencies of nature; but, not knowing how to attain it, are turning their back upon Christ and His cross, and betaking themselves to the resources of a spurious religion.

It is against this most mischievous and soul-destroying system that the apostle warns us, in such glowing words in Colossians 2. "Let no man," he says, "beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances" — such as, "touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using — after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." Colossians 2:18-23.

We deem it needful to say thus much lest any of our readers should at all mistake us on the subject of self-surrender. We desire it to be distinctly understood that the only possible ground of self-surrender is the knowledge of accomplished redemption, and our union with Christ through the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the essential basis of all Christian conduct. In short, a known salvation is the basis; the Holy Ghost indwelling, the power; and the word of God, the directory of all true self-surrender.

But what did Gideon and his companions know of these things? Nothing, as Christians now know them. But they had confidence in God, and further, they did not make their own refreshment their object, but simply took it up by the way as a means to an end. Herein they teach a fine lesson even to those whose privilege it is to walk in the full orb'd light of New Testament Christianity. If they, in the dim twilight in which they lived, could trust God, and surrender self for the moment, even in measure; then what shall we

say for ourselves who, with all our light and privileges, are so ready to doubt God and seek our own things?

Is it not painfully evident that, in this our day of light and privilege, there is but little moral preparedness for the path of service and conflict which we are called to tread? Alas! alas! we cannot deny it. There is a deplorable lack of genuine trust in the living God, and of the true spirit of self-surrender. Here, we may rest assured, is the deep secret of the whole matter. God is not practically known and habitually trusted; self is exalted and indulged. Hence our unfitness for the warfare, our failure in the day of battle. It is one thing to be saved, and quite another thing to be a soldier. It is one thing to have our sins forgiven, and quite another to have our swords sharpened and our shields well up. There is a vast difference between talking about conflict and taking part therein; and we cannot shake off the painful conviction that, in this day of widely extended profession, the proportion of workmen and warriors would not be found a whit greater than it was in the days of Gideon and his companions. The fact is we want men of faith, and men of one idea, men whose hearts are fixed and their eyes single, men so absorbed with Christ and His cause that they have no time for aught beside. We greatly fear that, if the double test which was applied to Israel in the days of Gideon, were to be applied now to those who stand on the very highest platform of profession, the practical result would not differ very materially.

But we must draw this paper to a close, and shall therefore rapidly touch on two leading points, and then leave our readers to meditate closely upon the whole subject for themselves.

The close of Judges 7 shows us Gideon and his companions completely victorious. "The cake of barley bread," and "the broken pitchers," proved a match for all the power of the Midianites and the Amalekites, although the latter "lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude." God was with the cake of barley bread and the pitchers, as He will ever be with those who are prepared to take the low place; prepared to be nothing, but to make Him their all in all; prepared to trust Him and to sink self. This, let it never be forgotten, is the great root principle in all service and in all

conflict. Without it, we can never succeed; with it, we can never fail. It matters not what the difficulties, or what the numbers and power of our enemies, all must give way before the presence of the living God; and that presence will ever accompany those who trust Him and sink self.

Nor is this all. Not only is firm trust in God and self-surrender the secret of victory over external enemies; it is also the secret of overcoming, disarming, and melting down jealous and envious brethren, though these latter are often far more difficult to deal with than open enemies. Thus no sooner had Gideon reached the point of victory over the uncircumcised, than he was called to encounter the petty and contemptible jealousy of his brethren. "And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not when thou wentest to fight the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply." Judges 8:1.

All this was most uncalled for and unworthy. Had they not heard the sound of the trumpet calling Israel to the battle field? Had they not heard that the standard was unfurled? Why had they not rushed to the battle at the first? It was an easy matter to come in at the close and reap the spoil, and then find fault with the one who had been God's real instrument on the occasion.

However, we shall not dwell upon the unlovely conduct of the men of Ephraim; but turn for a moment, to the exquisite way in which Gideon was enabled to meet them. "And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? . . . God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him when he had said that."

Here, Christian reader, is the true way to vanquish jealous and envious brethren. The cake of barley bread and the empty pitcher can vanquish jealous Ephraimites as well as hostile Midianites. A self-hiding spirit is the grand secret of victory over envy and jealousy, in all their odious forms. It is difficult, if not impossible, to quarrel with a man who is down in the dust, in true self-abasement. "What have I done now in comparison of you?" This is the language of one who had learnt something of the real meaning of self-

surrender; and we may safely assert that such language must ever disarm the envy and jealousy of the self-occupied and self-sufficient. May we know more and more of the truth of this!

But we must now contemplate the closing scene of Gideon's remarkable history — a scene full of admonition for every servant of Christ. From it we learn that it is far easier to gain a victory than to make a good use of it; far easier to reach a position than to occupy it aright. We shall quote the passage. "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you.

So far, this was very fine. It was in full keeping with the self-surrender of Gideon's previous course. Every true servant of Christ will ever seek to connect souls with his Master, and not with himself. Gideon would not, for worlds, displace Jehovah as the ruler of Israel. But alas! what he shrank from, in one form, he fell into, in another; and this too, simply because his self-surrender was not complete. There has been but One whose self-surrender was, and that One must, in all things, have the pre-eminence. "And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.... And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house." Judges 8:22-27.

Such is man, even the best of men, when left to himself. Here we see the very man who had led his brethren on to victory over Midian, now leading them into dark and abominable idolatry. The earrings of the Ishmaelites did what their swords could not do; and the love-tokens of the men of Israel proved far more dangerous than the sharp chidings of the men of Ephraim. The latter drew out a lovely spirit of self-emptiness: the former proved a snare to Gideon and to the whole house of Israel.

Reader, let us remember all this. If Gideon had refused the earrings as well as the throne, it would have been well for him and for his brethren; but the devil laid a snare for him into which he fell and carried all his brethren with him. May we all take warning from Gideon's fall, and draw encouragement from Gideon's victories. May we remember that it is one thing to gain a victory, and another to make good use of it; it is easier to reach a position than to occupy it aright. May God grant to the reader and writer of these lines, more simple confidence in Himself, and more of the true spirit of self-surrender. May such be the result of our meditations upon Gideon and his companions.

C. H. M.

1 Samuel 4 and 7.

God's Fulness for an Empty Vessel.

The two chapters given above furnish a most impressive illustration of a principle which runs all through the inspired volume, namely, that the moment man takes his right place, God can meet him in perfect grace — free, sovereign, unqualified grace: the fullness of God waits on an empty vessel. This great principle shines everywhere from Genesis to Revelation. The word "principle" hardly expresses what is meant; it is too cold. We would speak of it as a grand, living, divine fact, which shines with heavenly lustre in the gospel of the grace of God and in the history of God's people collectively and individually, both in the Old and New Testament times.

But man must be in his right place. This is absolutely essential. It is only there he can get a right view of God. When man as he is, meets God as He is, there is a perfect answer to every question, a divine solution of every difficulty. It is from the standpoint of utter and hopeless ruin that man gets a full, clear, delivering view and sense of God's salvation. It is when man gets to the end of himself in every shape and form — his bad self and his good self, his guilty self and his righteous self — that he begins with a Saviour-God. This is true at the starting-post, and true all along the way. The fullness of God ever waits on an empty vessel. The great difficulty is to get the vessel empty: when that is done, the whole matter is settled, because the fullness of God can then flow in.

This surely is a grand, fundamental truth; and in the chapters which stand at the head of this paper we see it in its application to the Lord's earthly people of old. Let us turn to them for a moment.

In the opening of 1 Samuel 4 we find Israel defeated by the Philistines; but instead of humbling themselves before the Lord, in true contrition and self-judgement because of their terrible condition, and accepting their defeat as the just judgement of God, there is utter insensibility and hardness of heart. "And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore

hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" Now it is very evident from these words that the elders were not in their right place. The word "wherefore" would never have dropped from their lips had they but realized their moral condition. They would have known too well why it was. There was shameful sin in their midst — the vile conduct of Hophni and Phinehas. "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord" (1 Sam. 2: 17).

But alas! the people had no true sense of their terrible condition, and, as a consequence, they had no true sense of the remedy. Hence they say, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." What a delusion! What utter blindness! There is no self-judgement, no confession of the dishonour done to the name and worship of the God of Israel, no looking to Jehovah in true brokenness and contrition of heart. No; there is the vain notion that the ark would save them out of the hand of their enemies.

"So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God." What a fearful condition of things! The ark of God associated with those ungodly men whose wickedness was about to bring down upon the whole nation the just judgement of a holy and righteous God. Nothing can be more dreadful, nothing more offensive to God, than the daring attempt to connect His name, His truth, with wickedness. Moral evil, under any circumstances, is bad enough; but the attempt to combine moral evil with the name and service of Him who is holy and true, is the very highest and darkest form of wickedness, and can only bring down the heavy judgement of God. Those ungodly priests, the sons of Eli, had dared to defile the very precincts of the sanctuary with their abominations; and yet these were the men who accompanied the ark of God into the field of battle. What blindness and hardness of heart! That one sentence, "Hophni and Phinehas were there with the ark of the covenant of God," embodies in its brief compass the terrible reflection of Israel's moral condition.

"And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all *Israel shouted with a great shout*, so that the earth rang again." How vain was the shout! — how hollow the boast! — how empty the pretension! Alas! it was followed, as must ever be the case, by humiliating defeat. "The Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain."

What a condition of things! The priests slain; the ark taken; the glory departed. The ark in which they boasted, and on which they confidently built their hope of victory, was actually in the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines. All was gone. That one terrible fact — the ark of God in the house of Dagon — told the melancholy tale of Israel's complete failure and ruin. God must have reality, truth and holiness in those with whom He deigns to dwell. "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, forever." It was a privilege of the very highest order to have Jehovah dwelling in their midst; but it demanded holiness. He could not connect His name with unjudged sin. Impossible. It would be a denial of His nature, and God cannot deny Himself. He must have the place where He dwells suited to His nature and character. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." This is a grand, fundamental truth, which must be tenaciously held and reverently confessed. It must never be surrendered.

But let us glance for a moment at the history of the ark in the land of the Philistines. It is at once solemn and instructive. Israel had signally failed and shamefully sinned. They had proved themselves wholly unworthy of the ark of the covenant of the Lord; and the Philistines had laid their uncircumcised hands upon it, and actually presumed to bring it into the house of their false god, as if the Lord God of Israel and Dagon could be in the same house! Blasphemous presumption! But the glory which had departed from Israel was vindicated in the darkness and solitude of the temple of Dagon.

God will be God, however His people may fail; and hence we see that when Israel had utterly failed to guard the ark of His testimony, and allowed it to pass into the hands of the Philistines, — when all was lost in man's hand, — then the glory of God shone out

in power and splendour: Dagon fell, and the whole land of the Philistines was made to tremble beneath the hand of Jehovah. His presence was intolerable to them, and they sought to get rid of it as soon as possible. It was proved beyond all question to be utterly impossible that Jehovah and the uncircumcised could go on together. Thus it was, thus it is, and thus it ever must be. "What concord hath Christ with Belial? . . . And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" None whatever.

Let us now turn for a few moments to 1 Sam. 7. Here we find another condition of things altogether. Here we shall find something of the empty vessel, and, as is ever the case, the fullness of God waiting upon it. "And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and *all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*" In 1 Sam. 5 and 1 Sam. 6 we see that the Philistines could not do *with* Jehovah. In 1 Sam. 7 we see that Israel could not do *without* Him. This is striking and instructive. The world cannot endure the very thought of the presence of God. We see this from the very moment of the fall, in Gen. 3. Man fled away from God ere God drove him out of Eden. He could not endure the divine presence. "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Thus it has ever been, from that moment to the present. As some one has said, "If you could put an unconverted man into Heaven, he would get out of it as soon as possible." What a telling fact! How it stamps the whole human race, and accounts for any depth of moral pravity into which a member of that race may sink! If man cannot endure the presence of God, where is he fit for, and what is he capable of? Weighty and solemn questions!

But "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Twenty long, dreary years had rolled on without the blessed sense of His presence; "And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord *with all your hearts*, then put away the strange gods, and Ashtaroth, from among you, and *prepare your hearts* unto the Lord, and serve Him *only*, and HE" not the ark — "will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray

for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord" (1 Sam. 7: 2-6.)

Here we have a different condition of things altogether from that presented in 1 Sam. 4. Here we see the empty vessel getting ready to receive the fullness of God. There is no hollow assumption, no looking to an outward form for salvation. All is reality, all heart-work here. Instead of the boastful shout, there is the out-poured water — the striking and expressive symbol of utter weakness and good-for-nothingness. In a word, man is taking his right place; and that, as we know, is the sure precursor of God taking His place. This great principle runs like a beautiful golden line all through the divine volume, all through the history of God's people, all through the history of souls. It is wrapped up in that brief but comprehensive clause, "Repentance and remission of sins." Repentance is man's true place. Remission of sins is God's response. The former is the empty vessel; the latter, the fullness of God. When these meet, all is settled.

This is very strikingly presented in the scene now before us. Israel having taken their true place, God is free to act on their behalf. They had confessed themselves to be as water poured upon the ground — perfectly helpless, perfectly worthless. This was all they had to say for themselves, and this was enough. God can now enter the scene and make short work with the Philistines. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

"And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel" — How little they knew whom they were coming against, or who was about to meet them! "But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.... Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer (the stone of help), saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

What a contrast between Israel's boastful shout in 1 Sam. 4 and Jehovah's thunder in 1 Sam. 7! The former was human pretension; the latter, divine power. That was instantly followed by humiliating defeat; this, by splendid triumph. The Philistines knew nothing of what had taken place — the water poured out, the penitential cry, the offering up of the lamb, the priestly intercession. What could uncircumcised Philistines know about these precious realities? Just nothing. When the earth rang with Israel's pretentious shout, they could take cognisance of that. The men of the world can understand and appreciate self-assertion and self-confidence; but these are the very things that shut out God. On the other hand, a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a lowly mind, are His delight. When Israel took the low place, the place of self-judgement and confession, then Jehovah's thunder was heard, and the host of the Philistines was scattered and confounded. The fullness of God ever waits on an empty vessel. Blessed, precious truth! May we enter more fully into its depth, fullness, power, and scope!

Ere closing this brief paper, I would just observe that 1 Sam. 4 and 7 remind us of the churches of Laodicea and Philadelphia, in Rev. 3. The former presents to us a condition which we should sedulously avoid; the latter, a condition which we should diligently and earnestly cultivate. In that, we see miserable self-complacency, and Christ left outside. In this, we see conscious weakness and nothingness, but Christ exalted, loved, and honoured; His Word kept, and His Name prized.

And be it remembered that these things run on to the end. It is very instructive to see that the last four of the seven churches give us four phases of the Church's history right on to the end. In Thyatira, we find Romanism; in Sardis, Protestantism. In Philadelphia, as we have said, we have that condition of soul, that attitude of heart, which every true believer and every assembly of believers should diligently cultivate and faithfully exhibit. Laodicea, on the contrary, presents a condition of soul and an attitude of heart from which we should shrink with godly fear. Philadelphia is as grateful as Laodicea is loathsome to the heart of Christ. The former, He will make a pillar in the temple of His God; the latter, He will spew out of His mouth, and Satan will take it up and make it a cage of every

unclean and hateful bird — Babylon! An awful consideration for all whom it may concern. And let us never forget that for any to pretend to be Philadelphia is really the spirit of Laodicea. Wherever you find pretension, assumption, self-assertion or self-complacency, there you have, in spirit and principle, Laodicea — from which may the good Lord deliver all His people!

Let us be content to be nothing and nobody in this scene of self-exaltation. Let it be our aim to walk in the shade, as far as human thoughts are concerned, yet never be out of the sunshine of our Father's countenance. In a word, let us ever bear in mind that *"the fullness of God ever waits on an empty vessel."*

1 Samuel 16

The Life and Times of David — *the life of faith.*

Introduction

The steps which led to the setting up of a king in Israel are easily traced, and easily accounted for, by all who have studied with any attention the humbling history of the human heart, either as presented in themselves or in others.

In the opening chapters of First Samuel we are furnished with a most instructive and solemn picture of Israel's condition. The house of Elkanah is taken up by the sacred penman as a striking illustration of Israel after the flesh, and Israel after the Spirit. "He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."

Thus we have in the domestic circle of this Ephrathite the early scenes of Sarah and Hagar enacted over again. Hannah was the barren woman — and she was made to feel it deeply, for "her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb."

The barren woman is in Scripture the type of nature's ruined and helpless condition. There is no ability to do anything for God — no power to bring forth any fruit to Him; all is death and barrenness. Such is the real condition of every child of Adam. He can neither do anything for God nor for himself, as regards his eternal destiny. He is emphatically "without strength"; he is "a dry tree," "a heath in the desert." Such is the lesson taught us by the barren woman.

However, the Lord caused His grace to abound over all Hannah's weakness and need, and put a song of praise into her mouth. He enabled her to say, "My horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in Thy salvation." It is the Lord's special province to make the barren woman rejoice. He alone can say, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not

travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord" (Isa. 54: 1).

Hannah realized this, and widowed Israel will ere long realize it also, "for her Maker is her husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name; and her Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." The beautiful song of Hannah is the soul's thankful acknowledgement of God's actings in reference to Israel. "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." All this will be most fully exemplified in Israel in the latter day; and it is now exemplified in the person of every one who through grace is raised from his ruined condition in nature to blessedness and peace in Jesus.

The birth of Samuel filled up a great blank, not only in the heart of Hannah, but doubtless in the heart of every faithful Israelite who sighed for the true interests of the Lord's house and the purity of the Lord's offering, both of which were alike disregarded and trampled upon by the unholy sons of Eli. In Hannah's desire for "*a man child*," we perceive not merely the development of the heart of a *mother*, but that of an *Israelite*. She had, no doubt, beheld and mourned over the ruin of everything connected with the temple of the Lord. The dimmed eye of Eli — the vile actings of Hophni and Phinehas — the fading lamp — the desecrated temple — the despised sacrifice — all conspired to tell Hannah that there was a real want, which want could alone be supplied by the precious gift of a man-child from the Lord. Hence she says to her husband, "I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, *that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide forever.*"

"Abide forever!" Nothing short of this could satisfy the longing soul of Hannah. It was not the mere matter of wiping away her own reproach that rendered Samuel so precious in her eyes. No! she longed to see "a faithful priest" standing before the Lord; and by faith her eye rested on one who was to abide there forever. Precious, elevating faith — that holy principle which lifts the soul above the

depressing influence of things seen and temporal, into the light of things unseen and eternal!

In chapter 3 we have the prediction of the terrible downfall of Eli's house. "And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, *and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see*; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; *that the Lord called Samuel.* " This was very expressive — solemnly expressive. Eli's eyes "dim," and the Lord's call to Samuel: in other words, Eli's house is passing away, and the faithful priest is about to enter upon the scene. Samuel runs to Eli, but, alas, all the latter could say was, "*Lie down again.*" He had no message for the child. Hoary and dim, he could spend his time in sleep and darkness, while the Lord's voice was sounding so very near him. Solemn, most solemn warning!

Eli was a priest of the Lord, but he failed to walk watchfully, failed to order his house according to the testimonies of God, failed to restrain his sons; hence we see the sad end to which he came. "And the Lord said to Samuel Behold, I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Sam. 3: 11-13)

"Whatsoever a man soweth," says the apostle, "that shall he also reap." How true is this in the history of every child of Adam! — how peculiarly true in the history of every child of God! According to our sowing shall be our reaping. So Eli was made to feel; and so shall the writer and the reader of this. There is much more of solemn, practical reality in this divine statement than many are apt to imagine. If we indulge in a wrong current of thought, if we adopt a wrong habit of conversation, if we pursue a wrong line of acting, we must inevitably reap the fruits of it sooner or later.* May this reflection lead us to more holy watchfulness in our ways; may we be more careful to "sow to the Spirit," that so, of the Spirit, we may "reap life everlasting"!

{*The statement in the text, I need hardly say, does not by any means interfere with the eternal stability of divine grace and the perfect acceptance of the believer in all the acceptableness of Christ before God. This is a great foundation truth. Christ is the believer's life, and Christ is his righteousness — the ground of his peace with God. He may lose the enjoyment of it, but the thing itself God has established upon an indestructible basis, and before ever it can be touched the fact of Christ's resurrection must be called in question, for clearly He could not be where He is if the believer's peace were not perfectly settled. In order to have perfect peace, I must know my perfect justification: and in order to know my perfect justification, I must know, by faith in God's Word, that Christ has made a perfect atonement. This is the divine order — perfect atonement as the ground of my perfect justification; and perfect justification as the ground of my perfect peace. God has joined those three together, and let not man's unbelieving heart put them asunder.

Hence, therefore, the statement in the text will not, I trust, be misunderstood or misapplied. The principle contained therein may be thus illustrated: If my child does wrong, he may injure himself and grieve and displease me; but he is my child all the while. The apostolic statement is as broad as possible — "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He does not say whether it is a converted or an unconverted man, and therefore the passage should have its full application. It could not possibly touch the question of pure and absolute grace.}

In 1 Sam. 4 a humiliating picture of Israel's condition in connection with the declining house of Eli is presented. "Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men." Here Israel was being made to realize the curse of a broken law. See Deut. 28: 25. They could not stand before their enemies, being weak and powerless by reason of their disobedience.

And observe the nature and ground of their confidence, in this their time of need and pressure: "And when the people were come

into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." Alas, what a miserable ground of confidence! Not a word about *the Lord Himself*. They thought not of *Him* as the source of their strength; they made not *Him* their shield and buckler. No! they trusted in the ark; they vainly imagined that it could save them. How vain! How could *it* avail them aught when unaccompanied by the presence of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel? Impossible! But He was no longer there; He had been grieved away by their unconfessed and unjudged sin; nor could any symbol or ordinance ever supply His place.

However, Israel vainly imagined that the ark would do all for them; and great was their joy, though not well founded, when it made its appearance among them, accompanied, not by Jehovah, but by the wicked priests Hophni and Phinehas. "And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." All this was very imposing; but, ah, it was hollow; their triumph was as baseless as it was unbecoming; they ought to have known themselves much better than to make such an empty display. Their shout of triumph harmonised badly with their low moral condition in the sight of God; and yet it will ever be found that those who know least of themselves set up the highest pretensions, and assume the highest position.

The Pharisee in the Gospel looked down with an air of proud indifference on the self-abased publican; he imagined himself very high up and the publican very low down in the scale; yet how different were God's thoughts about the two! Thus it is the broken and contrite heart will ever be the dwelling-place of God, who, blessed be His name, knows how to lift up and comfort every such heart as none else can do. Such is His peculiar work — the work in which He delights.

But the men of this world will always attach importance to high pretensions. They like them, and, generally speaking, give a high place in their thoughts to those who assume to be somewhat;

while, on the other hand, they will seek to put the really self-abased man still lower. Thus, in the instructive scene before us in this chapter, the Philistines attached no small importance to the shout of the men of Israel. It was like themselves, and therefore they could apprehend and appreciate it.

"And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God is come into the camp," etc. They naturally supposed that the shout of triumph was based on a reality: they saw not what was beneath the surface; they understood not the meaning of a defiled priesthood, a despised sacrifice, a desecrated temple. They beheld the outward symbol, and imagined that power accompanied it; hence their fear. How little did they know that their fear and Israel's triumph were alike groundless. "Be strong," said they, "and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight."

Here was the resource of the Philistines — "quit yourselves *like men*." Israel could not do this. If prevented by sin from bringing the resources of God to bear upon their circumstances, they were weaker than other men; Israel's only hope was in God; and if God were not there, if it were a mere conflict between man and man, an Israelite was no match for a Philistine. The truth of this was most fully established on the occasion to which we are referring. "The Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten." How else could it be? Israel could but be smitten and fly when their shield and buckler, even God Himself, was not in their midst. They were smitten; the glory departed from them; the ark was taken: they were shorn of their strength; their shout of triumph was exchanged for the piercing cry of sorrow; their portion was defeat and shame; and the aged Eli, whom we may regard as the representative of the existing system of things, fell with that system, and was buried in its ruins.

1 Sam. 5 and 1 Sam. 6 embrace the period during which "Ichabod" was written upon the nation of Israel. During this time God ceased to act publicly for Israel, and the ark of His presence was carried about from city to city of the uncircumcised Philistines.

This period is full of instruction. The ark of God amongst strangers, and Israel for the time being set aside, are circumstances which cannot fail to interest the mind and fix the attention of the intelligent and thoughtful student of Scripture.

"And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer to Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon." Here we are presented with the sad and humiliating result of Israel's unfaithfulness. With what a careless hand and faithless heart had they kept the ark of God when it could ever be brought to find a lodging-place in the temple of Dragon! How deeply Israel had failed! They had let go everything; they had given up that which was most sacred, to be profaned and blasphemed by the uncircumcised.

And observe the house of Dagon was deemed sufficiently sacred for the ark of Jehovah, which belonged to the holiest of all. The shadow of Dagon was to be substituted for the wings of the cherubim and the beams of the divine glory. Such were the thoughts of the lords of the Philistines; but not so God's thoughts. Israel, on the one hand, had failed in defending the ark; they had failed to recognize the great truth that it should ever have been connected with the presence of God among them.

All this might be true, and moreover, the lords of the Philistines might presume to insult the sacred symbol of the divine presence by impiously associating it with Dagon their god. In a word, the Israelites might prove faithless, and the Philistines profane, but the God of Israel must ever be true to Himself, ever true to His own holiness, and Dagon must fall prostrate before the ark of His presence. "And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold: only the stump of Dagon was left to him" (1 Sam. 5: 3-4)

Now we can hardly conceive anything more depressing and humiliating, to all appearances than the condition of things at this crisis in Israel's history. They beheld the ark snatched from their midst; they had proved themselves unfit and unable to occupy the place of God's witnesses in the view of the nations around them; and as to the grounds of triumph by the enemies of the truth, it was enough to say, "The ark is in the house of Dagon." This was truly terrible, when looked at from one point of view; but oh, how ineffably glorious when looked at from another! Israel had failed, and had let go everything that was sacred and precious; they had allowed the enemy to lay their honour in the dust, and trample on their glory; yet God was above all, beyond all; beneath all.

Here was the deep source of consolation to every faithful heart. Truly God was there, and showed Himself in wondrous power and glory. If Israel would not act in defence of God's truth, He must act Himself; and so He did. The lords of the Philistines had vanquished Israel; but the gods of the Philistines must fall prostrate before that ark which of old had driven back the waters of Jordan. Here was divine triumph. In the darkness and solitude of the house of Dagon where there was no eye to see, no ear to hear — the God of Israel was acting in defence of those great principles of truth which His Israel had so failed to maintain. Dagon fell, and in his fall proclaimed the honour of the God of Israel. The darkness of the moment only afforded an opportunity for the divine glory to shine out with brilliancy. The scene was so thoroughly emptied of the creature that the Creator could show Himself in His own proper character. "Man's extremity was God's opportunity." His failure made room for the divine faithfulness. The Philistines had proved stronger than Israel; but Jehovah was stronger than Dagon.

Now all this is replete with instruction and encouragement at a time like the present, when the people of God are so sadly declining from that deep tone of devotedness and separation which ought to characterise them. We should bless the Lord for the full assurance of His faithfulness — "He cannot deny Himself"; "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His, and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Hence, in darkest times He will maintain His truth and

raise up a witness for Himself, even though it should be in the house of Dagon. Christians may depart from God's principles, but the principles remain the same: their purity, their power, their heavenly virtue, are in no wise affected by the fickleness and inconsistency of faithless professors, and in the end truth will triumph.

However, the effort of the Philistines to keep the ark of God among them proved a complete failure. They could not make Dagon and Jehovah dwell together — how blasphemous the attempt! "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" None! The standard of God can never be lowered so as to accommodate itself to the principles which govern the men of this world; and the attempt to hold Christ with one hand and the world with the other must issue in shame and confusion of face. Yet how many are making that effort! How many are there who seem to make it the great question, how much of the world they can retain without sacrificing the name and privileges of Christians! This is a deadly evil, a fearful snare of Satan, and it may with strict propriety be denominated the most refined selfishness. It is bad enough for men to walk in the lawlessness and corruption of their own hearts; but to connect evil with the holy name of Christ is the climax of guilt.

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" (Jer. 7: 3, 8-10) Again, we read, as one of the special characteristics of the last days, that men shall have "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof."

The *form* suits the worldly heart, because it serves to keep the conscience at ease, while the heart enjoys the world in all its attractiveness. What a delusion! How needful the apostolic admonition, "*From such turn away*"! Satan's masterpiece is the amalgamation of things apparently Christian with things decidedly unholy. He deceives more effectually by this scheme than any other, and we need more spiritual perception to detect it in consequence. The Lord grant us this, for He knows how much we need it.

1 Sam. 7. Passing over much that is valuable in chapters 5 and 6 we must dwell a little upon Israel's happy restoration, in connection with the ministry of "the faithful priest."

Israel had been allowed to mourn for many a day the absence of the ark; their spirits drooped under the withering influence of idolatry; and at length their affections began to go out after the Lord. But in this revival we learn how deeply they had been sunk in death. This is always the case.

When Jacob of old was called upon to go up to Bethel from amid the defilement of Shechem, he had but little idea of how he and his family had become entangled in the meshes of idolatry. But the call to "*go up to Bethel*" roused his dormant energies, quickened his conscience, and sharpened his moral perception. Hence he says to his household, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments." The very idea of Bethel, where God had appeared to him, exerted a reviving influence on the soul of Jacob; and he being revived himself was enabled to lead others also in fresh power.

Thus it is with Jacob's seed in this chapter. "And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and *prepare your hearts unto the Lord*, and serve Him *only*; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." We observe here what a downward course Israel had been pursuing in connection with the house of Eli. The first step in evil is to place confidence in a form apart from God; apart too from those principles which make the form valuable. The next step is to set up an idol. Hence we find Israel saying of the ark, "That *it* may save us." But now the word of the prophet is, "Put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you."

Reader, is there not a solemn admonition in all this for the professing Church? Truly there is. The present is pre-eminently a day of form without power. The spirit of cold and uninfluential formalism is moving upon the face of Christendom's troubled waters, and soon all will settle down in the deathlike calm of false

profession, which will be broken in upon only by "the shout of the archangel and the trump of God."

However, the attitude assumed by Israel in 1 Sam. 7 forms a perfect contrast to the scene in 1 Sam. 4: "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord" (an expression of their weak, helpless condition) "and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord." This was real work, and we can say, *God is here now*. There is no confidence in a mere symbol or lifeless form; there is no empty pretension or vain assumption, no shout or baseless vaunting; all is deep and solemn reality. The earnest cry, the water poured out, the fast, the confession — all tell out the mighty change which had taken place in Israel's moral condition.

They now betake themselves to the faithful priest, and through him to the Lord Himself. They speak not now of fetching the ark. No; their word is, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that *He will* save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking-lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord; and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him." Here was the source of Israel's power. The sucking-lamb — God's gracious providing in tender remembrance of their need — gave a new aspect to their circumstances; it was the turning-point in their history on this occasion.

And observe, the Philistines seem to have been in total ignorance of all that was going on between Jehovah and Israel. They doubtless imagined that, inasmuch as they heard no shout of triumph, the Israelites were, if possible, in a more impoverished condition than before. They do not make the earth to ring again, as in 1 Sam. 4; but ah, there was a silent work going on which a Philistine's eye could not see, nor a Philistine's heart appreciate! What could a Philistine know about the penitential cry, the water poured out, or the sucking-lamb offered up? Nothing.

The men of this world can only take cognisance of that which lies on the surface. The outward show, the pomp and glare, the assumption of strength and greatness in the flesh, are well

understood by the world; but they know nothing of the reality of a soul exercised before God. And yet this latter is what the Christian should most earnestly seek after. An exercised soul is most precious in the sight of God; He can dwell with such at all times. Let us not assume to be anything, but simply take our proper place in the sight of God, and He will surely be our spring of power and energy, according to the measure of our need.

"And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel." Such were the happy results of simple dependence upon the God of the armies of Israel: it was somewhat like the glorious display of Jehovah's power on the shores of the Red Sea.

"The Lord is a man of war" when His people need Him, and their faith can count on Him as their present help in time of need. Whenever Israel truly turned to Jehovah, He was ever ready to appear in their behalf; but the glory must be *ad* His own. Israel's shout of empty triumph must be hushed, in order that the voice of Jehovah may be distinctly heard. And how blessed to be silent, and let Jehovah speak! What power in His voice to bring peace to His people, and to strike terror into the hearts of His enemies! "Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?"

1 Sam. 8. In this chapter we have a very marked step towards the setting up of a king in Israel. "And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.... And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgement." Sad picture! How like man in every age! Man corrupts himself and all committed to him at the first opportunity. Moses and Joshua foresaw Israel's turning away after their departure (Deut. 31: 29; Joshua 23: 15-16); and Paul could say to the Ephesian elders: "I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." So here; Israel no sooner recovers from the effects of the immorality of Eli's sons than they are made to feel the direful effects of the avarice of Samuel's sons, and thus are they hurried along the path which ended in the rejection of Jehovah and the setting up of Saul.

"When Samuel was old, *he made* his sons judges." But this was a very different thing indeed from God's appointment. The faithfulness of Samuel was no guarantee for his sons; just as we find in the boasted theory of apostolic succession. What kind of successors have we seen? How far have they resembled their predecessors? Paul could say, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold": can the so-called successors say so? Samuel could say, "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?" But alas, Samuel's sons and successors could not say this! To them "filthy lucre" was the leading spring of action.

Now we find in this chapter that Israel makes this evil of Samuel's sons the ostensible reason for asking a king. "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us *like ad the nations*." Fearful declension! Israel satisfied to come down to the level of the nations around! and all because Samuel was old and his sons covetous. The Lord is shut out. Had they looked up to Him, they would have had no reason for seeking to put themselves under the guardianship of a poor mortal like themselves.

But ah, the Lord's ability to guide and keep them was little thought of in all this scene! They cannot see beyond Samuel and his sons: if no help can be found from them, they must at once step down from their high elevation of having Jehovah as their King and make to themselves a human head like the nations around them. The attitude of faith and dependence on God is too difficult to be long maintained by the natural man. In 1 Sam. 7 God had been owned as their King, but now it is not so: God is shut out and a king is the all engrossing object. We shall soon see the sad result of all this.

1 Sam. 9 - 1 Sam. 13. These chapters furnish us with the character of Saul, together with his anointing and the opening of his rule. I shall not dwell upon it in this introduction, being merely desirous to call the reader's attention to the steps which led to the setting up of a king in Israel.

Saul was emphatically the man after Israel's heart: he had all that the flesh could desire — "a choice young man, and a goodly; and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people." This was all very imposing to those who could only look upon the outward appearance; but what lay beneath this attractive exterior! Saul's whole course is marked with selfishness and pride, under the cloak of humility. True, the Spirit came upon him as one set apart to be an office-bearer among the people of God;* but he was throughout a self-seeker, and he only used the name of God for his own ends, and the things of God as a pedestal on which to set forth his own glory.

{*My reader should accurately distinguish between the Holy Ghost coming *upon* people and the Holy Ghost dwelling and acting in them. The statement in 1 Sam. 10: 6 may present a difficulty to some minds. "The Spirit of the Lord will come *upon* thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man." This is not the Spirit producing the new birth, but merely fitting Saul to be an office-bearer. Were it regeneration, it would not merely be the Spirit coming *upon*, but acting *in*, a man. Saul the *office-bearer* and Saul the *man* are quite distinct, and this distinction must be maintained in reference to many of the characters both in the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

An all important difference is to be observed between the operations of the Spirit previous and subsequent to Christ's resurrection.}

The scene at Gilgal is truly characteristic, and develops much of Saul's principle of action. Impatient to wait for God's time, he "forces himself," and offers a burnt-offering, and has to hear from the lips of Samuel these solemn words: "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which He commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

This is just the sum of the matter, so far as Saul is concerned. "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord; thy kingdom shall not continue." Solemn verities! Saul, the man after man's heart, is set aside, to make room for the man after God's heart. The children of Israel had abundant opportunity of testing the character of the man whom they had chosen to lead them forth, and fight their battles. The reed on which they had so earnestly desired to lean had broken, and was about to pierce their hand.

Man's king, alas, what was he? Set him in an emergency, and how does he carry himself? Bustling self-importance marks all his actings. No dignity, no holy confidence in God, no acting on the broad principles of truth. Self, self, and that, too, in the most solemn scenes, and while apparently acting for God and His people. Such was man's king.

1 Sam. 14. This beautiful chapter furnishes a striking contrast between the efficacy of Israel's expedient, and that of the *old principle* of simple faith in God. Saul sits beneath a pomegranate tree, in display of empty pomp without any real power; while Jonathan, acting in the spirit of faith, is made the happy instrument of working salvation for Israel. — Israel, in unbelief, had asked for a king to fight their battles, and doubtless they imagined that, when blessed with a king, no enemy could stand before them: but was it so? One word in 1 Sam. 13 gives the reply: "All the people followed him *trembling*." What a change! How different from the mighty host who, of old, had followed Joshua into the strongholds of Canaan! And yet they now had their longed-for king before them; but, God was not there, and hence their trembling.

Let man have the fairest, the most imposing ordinance, without the sense of God's presence, and he is weakness itself. Let him have the presence of God in power, and nothing can resist him. Moses had, of old, done wonders with a simple rod in his hand; but now, Israel, with the man after their own heart full in their view, could do nought but tremble before their enemies. "All the people followed him trembling." How truly humiliating! "Nay; but we will have a king over us . . . that our king may judge us, and *go out before us and fight our battles*." Truly "it is better to trust in the

Lord, than to put confidence in princes." Jonathan proved this, most blessedly. He goes up against the Philistines in the power of that word, "There is no restraint with the Lord to save by many or by few." It was "the Lord" who filled his soul, and having Him, "many or few" made no difference. Faith does not reckon on circumstances, but on God.

And mark the change upon Israel the moment that faith begins to act amongst them. The trembling was transferred from Israel to the Philistines; "and there was a trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people; the garrison and the spoilers, they also trembled; and the earth quaked; so it was a very great trembling." Israel's star was now decidedly in the ascendant, simply because Israel was acting upon the principle of faith. Jonathan looked not to his father Saul for deliverance, but to Jehovah; he knew that He was a man of war, and on Him he leaned for the deliverance of Israel in the day of trouble. Blessed dependence! None like it.

Human ordinances perish — human resources vanish away; but "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." "It was a very great trembling," for God was putting His terror into their hearts, and filling Israel with joy and triumph. Jonathan's faith was owned of God in the establishment of those who had previously fled from the field of conflict into the mountains. Thus it is ever; one can never walk in the power of faith without giving an impetus to others; and, on the other hand, one coward heart is sufficient to deter a great many. Moreover, unbelief always drives one from the field of service or conflict, while faith, as surely, leads one into it.

But what of Saul in all this? How did he co-operate with the man of faith? He was perfectly incapable of any such acting. He sat under the pomegranate tree, unable to inspire courage into the hearts of those who had chosen him to be their captain; and when he did venture to move, or rather to bustle forth, he could do nought but hinder the precious results of faith by his rashness and folly. But we must hasten on to the close of these introductory remarks.

1 Sam. 15 presents us with the final testing and setting aside of man's king. "Go, *smite Amalek*." This is the test which really made

manifest the moral condition of Saul's heart. Had he been right before God, he would have executed God's judgement upon Amalek. But the issue proved that Saul had too much in common with Amalek to carry out the divine will in his destruction. What had Amalek done? "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt." In a word, Amalek stands before the spiritual mind as the first great obstacle to the progress of the redeemed from Egypt to Canaan; and we know what it is which fills a similar place in reference to those who now set out to follow the Lord Jesus.

Now, Saul had been just showing himself as a most decided obstacle in the way of the man of faith; indeed, his entire course was one of hostility to the principles of God. How, then, could he destroy Amalek? Impossible. "He spared Agag." Just so. Saul and Agag suited each other but too well, nor had he power to execute the judgement of God on this great enemy of His people. And mark the ignorance and self-complacency of this unhappy man. "And Samuel came to Saul; and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I *have performed the commandment of the Lord.*" Performed the commandment of the Lord, while Agag, king of the Amalekites, was yet alive! Oh, to what lengths of vain delusion will one go when not walking uprightly before God!

"What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in my ears?" Solemn, heart-searching inquiry! In vain is recourse had to the plausible matter of "*sacrifice unto the Lord.*" Miserable resource for disobedient hearts! As if the Lord would accept a sacrifice from one walking in positive rebellion against His commandment. How many since Saul's day have sought to cover a disobedient spirit with the plausible mantle of "sacrifice unto the Lord." Samuel's answer to Saul is of universal application, viz.: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." The Lord seeks not , offerings, but obedience: the subject heart and acquiescent spirit will glorify Him more than the cattle upon a thousand hills.

How important to have this great principle pressed home upon the conscience, when so many are cloaking all sorts of disobedience with the word, sacrifice, sacrifice! "*To obey is better than sacrifice.*" It is far better to have the will in subjection to God than to load His altar with the costliest sacrifices. When the will is in subjection, everything else will take its due place; but for one whose will is in rebellion against God to talk of sacrificing to Him is nothing but deadly delusion. God looks not at the amount of the sacrifice, but at the spirit from which it springs. Moreover, it will be found that all who, in Saul's spirit, speak of sacrificing unto the Lord, have concealed — beneath some selfish object — some Agag or other — the best of the sheep — or something attractive to the flesh, which is more influential than the service or worship of the blessed God.

May all who read these pages seek to know the real blessedness of a will entirely subject to God, for in it will be found that blessed rest which the meek and lowly Jesus promised to all who were heavy laden — the rest which He Himself found in being able to say, "I thank Thee, O Father . . . *for so it seemed good in Thy sight.*" God had desired Saul to destroy Amalek, but his heart desired to spare something which to *him*, at least, seemed good and desirable; he was ready to carry out the will of God in reference to all that was "*vile and refuse,*" but he thought he might make some exceptions, as if the line of distinction between that which was "refuse" and that which was "good" was to be drawn by his judgement, and not by the unerring judgement of Him who looked at Amalek from a true point of view, and saw in Agag one who, with all his delicacy, would resist Israel as strongly as ever, and this was His ground of controversy with Amalek, which Saul was unable to understand or appreciate.

The close of this chapter shows us, but too plainly, the current in which Saul's thoughts and desires were flowing. He had just heard the solemn appeal of Samuel, and the denunciations of God against him, concluded with these solemn words, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou." These stunning words had just fallen upon his ear; yet so full was he of self, that he could

say, "*Honour me* now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel."

This was Saul. "*The people*," said he, "spared what should have been destroyed" — it was their fault, but "*honour me*." Alas, what vanity! A heart steeped in iniquity seeking honour from his fellow-worms. Rejected of God as an office-bearer, he clings to the thought of human honour. It seems that, provided he could maintain his place in the estimation of his people, he cared but little what God thought of him. But he was rejected of God, and the kingdom torn from him; nor did it avail him much that Samuel turned again, and stood by, while Saul went through the form of worshipping the Lord, in order that he might not forfeit his place and influence amongst his people.

"Then said Samuel, Bring hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites; and Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless, among women. *And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.*" Agag's delicacy could not deceive one who was taught of God. How remarkable to find him hewing Agag in pieces *at Gilgal!* Gilgal was the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away from Israel; and, in tracing their history, we find it associated with much power over evil. Here it was, then, that this Amalekite came to his end by the hand of righteous Samuel.

This is most instructive. When the soul is blessed with the realization of its full deliverance from Egypt, by the power of death and resurrection, it is in the best position for obtaining victory over evil. Had Saul known anything of the spirit and principle of Gilgal, he would not have spared Agag. He was ready enough to go thither to "renew the kingdom," but by no means so to crush and set aside all that savoured of the flesh. But Samuel, acting in the energy of the Spirit of God, dealt with Agag according to the principles of truth; for it is written, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." *The king of Israel ought to have known this.*

1 Samuel 16 - Part 1 - DAVID ANOINTED

We now come to our theme — our rich and varied theme — the life and times of David, king of Israel.

In looking through Scripture, we observe how wonderfully the blessed God has ever brought good out of evil. It was Israel's sin to reject their King, Jehovah, and seek to set up a man over them; and in that man, who first wielded the sceptre over them, they had learnt how vain was the help of man. The Lord was now about to bring blessing to His people out of all their evil and folly.

Saul had been set aside, in the government of God; he had been weighed in the balance, and found wanting, his kingdom was to pass away from under his hand, and a man after God's own heart was about to be set upon the throne, to the glory of God, and the blessing of His people. "And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?"

These words let us into the secret of Samuel's sorrow in reference to Saul, during the long period of his separation from him. In the last verse of 1 Sam. 15 we read, "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul." This was natural. There was much that was affecting — deeply affecting to the heart in the melancholy fall of this unhappy man. He had once elicited from Israel the shout of "God save the king." Many an eye, full of enthusiasm, had doubtless rested upon "the choice young man and the goodly," and now all this was gone; Saul was rejected, and Samuel felt constrained to take a position of entire separation from him as one whom God had set aside.

This was the second office-bearer whom it had been Samuel's lot to see stripped of his robes of office; he had been the bearer of heavy tidings to Eli, at the opening of his career; and now, at the close of it, he was called upon to deliver, in the ear of Saul, the announcement of the judgement of Heaven against his course.

However, Samuel was called to enter into the thoughts of God in reference to Saul. "How long wilt *thou* mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?" Communion with God will ever lead us to acquiesce in His ways. Sentimentalism may weep over fallen greatness, but faith grasps the great truth that God's unerring counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure. Faith could not shed a tear over Agag, when hewed in pieces before the Lord, neither would it continue over a rejected Saul, because it ever flows in harmony with God, in His ways. But there is a wide difference between nature and faith; while the former sits down to weep, the latter arises and fills the horn with oil.

It is well to ponder this contrast. We are all too apt to be carried away by mere sentiment, which is often truly dangerous. Indeed, inasmuch as it is of nature, it must flow in a current different from the thoughts of the Spirit of God. Now, the most effectual remedy against the working of mere sentiment is a strong, deep, thorough, abiding conviction of the reality of the purpose of God. In the view of this, sentimentality withers and dies, while, on the other hand, faith lives and flourishes in the atmosphere of the purpose of God. This is impressively taught in the first verse of 1 Sam. 16: "How long wilt thou mourn? . . . Fill thy horn with oil, and go: I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons."

Yes; human sorrow must flow on until the heart finds repose in the rich resources of the blessed God. The varied blanks which human events leave in the heart can only be filled up by the power of faith in the precious word, "*I have provided.*" This really settles everything. This dries the tear, alleviates the sorrow, fills the blank. The moment the spirit rests in the provision of God's love, there is a period put to all repinings. May we all know the power and varied application of this truth; may we know what it is to have our tears dried up, and our horn filled by the conviction of our Father's wise and merciful provision.

This is a rare blessing; it is difficult to get completely above the region of human thought and feeling. Even a Samuel is found replying to the divine command, and manifesting a slowness to run in the way of simple obedience. The Lord said, "Go;" but Samuel

said, "*How can I go?*" Strange inquiry! yet how fully it develops the moral condition of the human heart. Samuel had been mourning for Saul, and now, when told to go and anoint one to fill his place, his reply is, "How can I?" Now we may be quite sure that faith never says this. There is no such word as "how" in the vocabulary of faith. No; the divine command no sooner marks out the path, than faith takes it up in willing obedience, not counting the difficulties.

However, the Lord, in tender mercy, meets His servant in his difficulty. "And the Lord said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord." Thus with a full horn and a sacrifice he sets off to the city of David, where an obscure and unthought of youth tended a few sheep in the wilderness.

Amongst the sons of Jesse, there would seem to have been some very fair specimens of nature — some whom Samuel, if left to the exercise of his own judgement, would have fixed upon to succeed to the crown of Israel. "And it came to pass when they were come, that he looked upon Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." But it was not so. Natural attraction had nothing to do with the Lord's election. He looks beneath the gilded surface of men and things, and judges according to His own unerring principles. We learn something of Eliab's haughty and self-sufficient spirit in 1 Sam. 17. But the Lord puts no confidence in the legs of a man, and thus Eliab was not His chosen vessel.

It is very remarkable to find Samuel so much and so often astray in this chapter. His mourning for Saul, his hesitation to go and anoint David, his mistake about Eliab, all shows how much astray he was as to the ways of God. How solemn is the Lord's word, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." This is the great difference; *the outward appearance,* and *"the heart."* Even Samuel was well nigh snared by the former, had not the Lord graciously interfered to teach him the value of the latter. "Look not on his countenance." Memorable words!

"Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Then Jesse

made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Again, Jesse made *seven of his sons* to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these." Thus the perfection, as it were, of nature passed before the prophet, but all in vain; nature could produce nought for God or His people.

And, what is still more remarkable, Jesse thought not of David in all this! The ruddy youth was in the solitude of the wilderness, with the sheep, and came not into mind in this review of nature's offspring. But, ah, the eye of Jehovah was resting upon this despised youth, and beholding in him the one who was to stand in the line through which, according to the flesh, Christ should come, to occupy the throne of David, and rule over the house of Israel for ever. Truly "God seeth not as man seeth," for He "hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen — yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1: 27-29).

If Eliab, or Shammah, or Abinadab, or any one of the "seven sons" of Jesse had had the anointing oil poured upon his head, flesh might have gloried in the presence of God; but the moment David — the forgotten David — appears on the scene, we recognize in him one who would give all the glory to Him who was about to put the sceptre into his hand. In a word, David stands before us as the marked type of the Lord Jesus, who, when He appeared amongst men, was despised, overlooked, and forgotten. And I may just add here, that we shall find, in ranging through David's instructive history, how strikingly he shadowed forth the true beloved of God.

"And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look at. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: *for this is he.*" "There remaineth yet the youngest." Surely he could not be the

elect one, thought Jesse. Man cannot understand the ways of God. The very instrument which God is about to make use of is overlooked or despised by man. "Arise, anoint him: for this is he," is God's perfect reply to the thoughts of Jesse and Samuel.

And how happy it is to note David's occupation. "Behold, he keepeth the sheep." This was afterwards referred to by the Lord, when He said to David, "I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel." Nothing can more sweetly illustrate God's thoughts of the kingly office than the work of a shepherd. Indeed, when it is not executed in the spirit of a shepherd, it fails of its end. King David fully entered into this, as may be seen in those touching words, "*These sheep*, what have they done?"

The people were the Lord's sheep, and he, as the Lord's shepherd, kept them on the mountains of Israel, just as he had kept his father's sheep in the retirement of Bethlehem. He did not alter his character when he came from the sheep-cote to the throne, and exchanged the crook for the sceptre. No; he was the shepherd still, and he felt himself responsible to protect the Lord's flock from the lions and bears which ever prowled around the fold.

The prophetic allusion to the true David is touching and beautiful. "Therefore will I save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it" (Ezek. 34: 22-24). Our Lord in John 10 presents Himself as the faithful and good Shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep; and, doubtless, in John 6, He had more or less reference to His shepherd character.

"And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." This is a great principle of truth. Independent of His own personal love for the sheep — so wonderfully attested in life and in death — the Lord Jesus, in the above memorable passage, presents Himself as one responsible —

voluntarily so, no doubt — to the Father, to keep every member of the loved and valued flock through all the vicissitudes of this life, and present them in resurrection-glory, at the last day.

Such is the Shepherd to whom a Father's hand has committed us; and, oh, how has He provided for us for time and eternity, by placing us in such hands — the hands of an ever-living, ever-loving, all-powerful Shepherd, whose love many waters cannot quench; whose power no enemy can countervail; who holds in His hand the keys of death and hell, and who has established His claim to the guardianship of the flock, by laying down His life for it. Truly we may say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." How can we want while Jesus feeds us? Impossible. Our foolish hearts may often desire to feed on noxious pasture, and our Shepherd may have to prove His gracious care by denying us the use of such, but one thing is certain, that those whom Jesus feeds shall not want any *good* thing.

There is something in the shepherd character which would seem to be much in harmony with the divine mind, inasmuch as we find the we find the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, all acting in that character. The twenty-third psalm may be primarily viewed as the experience of Christ delighting in the assurance of His Father's shepherd-care. Then, in John 10, we find the Son presented as the good Shepherd. Lastly, in Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, we find the Holy Ghost acting in that blessed capacity, by raising up and gifting for the work the subordinate shepherds. It is edifying to mark this. It is like our God to present Himself in the most endearing relationship, and that most calculated to win our confidence and draw out our affections. Blessed be His name forever! His ways are all perfect; there is none like Him.

I would just direct the reader's attention to the contrast between the circumstances in which Samuel found David, and those in which he found Saul. Remember that Saul was in pursuit of his father's asses, when he came in contact with Samuel. I do not interpret this fact, I merely refer to it. I believe it is expressive, in the way of evil, just as David's occupation, in the sheep-cote, was expressive of his future career, as the shepherd of Israel.* When we see David tending his father's sheep in the wilderness, overlooked,

or thought little of in the circle of his brethren, we are led to look for something corresponding in his after-course; nor are we disappointed. Just so, when we see Saul in search of his father's asses, we are led to look for something corresponding in his character and habits afterwards.

Trifling circumstances often teach a great deal. David's affectionate and tender solicitude for the Lord's flock and forgetfulness of self, may all be traced in the circumstances in which he is introduced to our notice; and, on the other hand, Saul's ambitious, self-seeking spirit may be traced in the object of his pursuit when he came in contact with Samuel. However, I simply leave the suggestion with the reader to use as the Lord may lead him, only reminding him that nothing can be insignificant which the Spirit has recorded concerning men who appear throughout in such marked contrast, and who each, in his way, occupied such an important place in the history of the people of God.

One can only say, Blessed be the grace which took up one to be ruler over His people, who manifested those traits of character which were most blessedly adapted to his work. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." Thus, then, David is fully before us as the Lord's anointed, and we have now to trace him in all his wanderings and vicissitudes, while rejected of man, and waiting for the kingdom.

1 Samuel 17:2 - Part 2 - THE VALLEY OF ELAH

“And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines”

No sooner had the anointing oil of the Lord been poured upon David, than he was called forth from his retirement to stand before king Saul, now forsaken of God, and troubled with an evil spirit. This unhappy man needed the soothing notes of David's harp to dispel the horrid influence of that spirit which now haunted him

from day to day. Wretched man! sad monument of the results of a self-seeking course!

David, however, did not hesitate to take his place as a *servant*, even in the house of one who was afterwards to prove his most bitter enemy. It was quite the same to him where he served or what he did; he would protect his father's flocks from lions and bears, or dispel an evil spirit from Saul. In fact, from the moment David's history opens, he is seen as a servant, ready for every kind of work, and the valley of Elah furnishes a most striking manifestation of his servant character.

Saul would seem to have had little idea of who it was that stood before him, and whose music refreshed his troubled spirit; he knew not that he had in his presence the future king of Israel. "He loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer." The selfish Saul would gladly use the services of David in his need, though ready to shed his blood when he understood who and what he was.

But let us turn our thoughts to the deeply interesting scenes in the valley of Elah.

"Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle." Here now we come to something calculated to bring out the true character and worth of Saul and David, the man of form and the man of power. It is trial that brings out the reality of a man's resources. Saul had already been proved, for "all the people had followed him trembling," nor was he likely to prove a more soul-stirring leader on this occasion. A man forsaken of God, and plagued by an evil spirit, was but little adapted to lead on an army to battle, and still less to meet, single-handed, the powerful giant of Gath.

The struggle in the valley of Elah was rendered exceedingly peculiar by the challenge, on the part of Goliath, to decide the matter by single combat; it was the very method in which an *individual* might be signalled. It was not, as in ordinary cases, army against army, but it was a question of who, throughout all the host of Israel, would venture to stand before the terrific uncircumcised foe. In fact, it is plain that the blessed God was about to make manifest again to Israel that, as a people, they were utterly powerless, and that their

only deliverance, as of old, was the arm of Jehovah, who was still ready to act in His wondrous character of "a man of war," whenever faith addressed Him as such.

For forty successive days did the Philistine draw near and present himself in the view of the unhappy Saul and his awe-struck army. And observe his bitter taunt — "Am not I a Philistine, and *ye servants to Saul?*" Alas! it was but too true; they had come down from their high elevation as servants to Jehovah to become mere servants to Saul. Samuel had forewarned them of all this — he had told them that they would become footmen, bakers, cooks, and confectioners to their self-chosen master; and all this, as their choice, instead of having the Lord God of Israel as their sole master and King. Nothing will teach man, however, save bitter experience; and the cutting taunts of Goliath would, no doubt, teach Israel afresh the real nature of their condition under the crushing rule of the Philistines. "Choose you *a man* for you, and let him come down to me," said the giant. How little did he know who was about to be his antagonist. He, in all his boasted fleshly strength, vainly imagined that no Israelite could stand before him.

And here we may inquire, what of Jonathan in all this scene? He who had acted in such simple faith and energy in 1 Sam. 14, why was he not now ready to go forth against this champion? I doubt not if we look particularly at his actings, we shall find that his faith was not of that simple, independent character which would carry a man through all kinds of difficulties. The defect in his faith appears in the words, *if* they say thus," etc. Faith never says "if"; it has to do only with God. When Jonathan said "There is no restraint to the Lord," he uttered a fine principle of truth, and one which should have carried him on without an "if." Had Jonathan's soul been reposing simply in the ability of *God*, he would not have sought for a sign. True, the Lord graciously gave him the sign, just as He had given one to Gideon before, for He ever meets His servants in all their needs. However, Jonathan does not make his appearance in the valley of Elah; he had, it seems, done his work, and acted according to his measure; but, in the scene now before us, there was a demand for something far deeper than anything Jonathan had known.

But the Lord was secretly preparing an instrument for this new and more difficult work. And may we not say it is ever thus that the blessed God acts? He trains in secret those whom He is about to use in public. He makes His servants acquainted with Himself in the secret solemnity of His sanctuary, and causes His greatness to pass in review before them, that thus they may be able to look with a steady gaze at the difficulties of their path.

Thus it was with David. He had been alone with God while keeping the sheep in the wilderness; his soul had become filled with the thought of God's power; and now he makes his appearance in the valley of Elah, in all the simplicity and self-renouncing dignity of a man of faith. The emptiness of man had been fully proved by the forty days of Goliath's haughty boasting. Saul could avail nothing; Jesse's three eldest sons could avail nothing; yea, even Jonathan could avail nothing; all was lost, or seemed to be, when the stripling David entered the scene, clothed in the strength of Him who was about to lay in the dust the pomp and glory of the proud Philistine.

The words of Goliath were reported to David, and in them he at once recognized a blasphemous defiance of the living God. "Who," said he, "is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of *the living God*?" David's faith recognized in the trembling host before him the army of the living God, and he at once made it a question between Jehovah and the Philistine.

This is most instructive: for no change of circumstances can ever rob the people of God of their dignity in the eye of faith. They may be brought low in the view of man, as in Israel's case on the present occasion, but faith ever recognises what God has imparted; and hence David, as he beheld his poor brethren fainting in the view of their terrible enemy, was enabled to acknowledge those with whom the living God had identified Himself, and who ought not therefore to be defied by an uncircumcised Philistine.

When faith is in exercise, it brings the soul into direct connection with the grace and faithfulness of God and His purposes toward His people. True, Israel had brought all this sorrow and humiliation upon themselves by their unfaithfulness; it was not of the Lord that they should quail in the presence of an enemy; it was

the fruit of their own doing, and faith would ever apprehend and acknowledge this. Still, the question is, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?"

This is the inquiry of faith. It was not the army of *Saul* that the man of faith beheld. No; it was the army of the *living God* — an army under the command of the same Captain that had led His hosts through the Red Sea, through the terrible wilderness, and through Jordan. Nothing less, nothing lower than this, could satisfy faith.

But then, how little are the judgement and the actings of faith understood or valued when things get low amongst the people of God! This is very apparent on every page of Israel's history, and, we may say, on every page of the Church's history also. The path of simple, childlike faith is far removed from human sight; and if the Lord's people sink into a low, carnal state, they can never understand the principle of power in the soul of one really acting by faith. He will be misunderstood in various ways, and have wrong motives attributed to him; he will be accused of setting himself up, or acting wilfully, independently. All these things must be expected by one who stands in the breach, at a time when things are low. Through lack of faith in the majority, a man is left alone, and then, when he is led to act for God, he will be misinterpreted .

Thus it was in David's case. Not only was he left alone in the time of difficulty, but he had to endure the taunt of the flesh, administered by Eliab, his eldest brother. "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I *know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thy heart*; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle" (1 Sam. 17: 28). This was the judgement of Eliab, in reference to the actings of David. "And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?"

David was borne onward by an energy quite unknown to Eliab, nor was he careful to enter upon a defence of his course to his haughty brother. Why had not Eliab acted himself for the defence of his brethren? Why had not Abinadab or Shammah acted? Because they were faithless; simply this. Not only had those three men

remained powerless, but the whole congregation had remained terror-stricken in the presence of the enemy, and now, when one appeared in their midst whom God was about to use marvellously, not one could understand him.

"And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Precious faith! no difficulty deters it — nothing stands in its way. What was the Philistine to David? Nothing. His tremendous height, his formidable armour, were mere circumstances; *and faith never looks at circumstances, but looks straight to God.* Had not David's soul been buoyed up by faith, he could not have uttered the words, "Thy servant will go"; for, harken to the words of him who ought to have been the first to face Israel's dreadful enemy: "And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine." What language for the king of Israel! What a contrast between the man of office and the man of power!

Surely Saul ought to have gone forth in the defence of the flock which had been entrusted to his care; but, ah! Saul cared not for Israel, unless so far as Israel was connected with himself, and hence his exposing his person on their behalf never, we may safely say, entered his selfish heart; and not only was he unable and unwilling to act himself, but would fain clog the energies of one who, even now, was putting forth the precious fruits of that divine principle implanted within him, and which was about to prove him so fit for the high office which the purpose of God had assigned to him, and to which His anointing oil had dedicated him.

"*Thou art not able.*" True, but Jehovah was; and David was leaning simply upon the strength of His arm. His faith laid hold of the ability of Him who had appeared to Joshua beneath the walls of Jericho, with a sword drawn in His hand, as "Captain of the host of the Lord." David felt that Israel had not ceased to be the Lord's host, though so far sunk from what they were in Joshua's day. No; they were still the army of the Lord, and the battle was just as much the Lord's battle as when the sun and the moon were arrested in their course in order that Joshua might execute the judgement of God upon the Canaanites. Simple faith in God sustained the spirit of

David, though Eliab might accuse him of pride, and Saul might talk of his want of ability.

There is nothing that can possibly give such energy and persevering power as the consciousness of acting *for God*, and that God is acting *with us*. This removes every obstacle; it lifts the soul above all human influence, and brings it into the very region of power omnipotent. Let us only be fully assured that we *are* on the Lord's side, and that His hand is acting with us, and nothing can drive us from the path of service and testimony — conduct us whither it may. "I can do all things," said the apostle, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." And again, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The very weakest saint can do all things through Christ. But if man's eye rests on this weak saint, it seems like presumption to talk of "doing all things."

Thus, when Saul looked upon David, and compared him with Goliath, he judged rightly when he said, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." It was a comparison of flesh with flesh, and, as such, it was quite correct. To compare a stripling with a giant would leave little room for hesitation as to the issue of the conflict; but he ought to have compared the strength of Goliath with that of the God of the armies of Israel. This was what David did.

"And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." This was the argument of faith. The hand that had delivered from one difficulty would deliver from another. There is no "if in all this. David did not wait for a sign; he simply said, "*Thy servant will go.*" David had felt the power of God's presence with him in secret before he came forth to present himself in public as the servant of God and of Israel.

As another has remarked, David had not boasted of his triumph over the lion and the bear; no one seemed to have heard of it before; nor would he probably have spoken of it, had it not been for the purpose of showing what a solid ground of confidence he had in reference to the great work on which he was about to enter. He would fain show that it was not in his own strength he was going forth. So was it in the matter of Paul's rapture to the third Heaven: for fourteen years had that circumstance remained buried as a secret with the apostle, nor would he have divulged it, had not the carnal reasonings of the Corinthians compelled him to do so.

Now, both these cases are full of practical instruction for us. With the majority of us, alas, there is too great a readiness to talk of our doings, or, at least, to think much of them. The flesh is prone to glory in anything that might exalt *self*; and if the Lord, despite of the evil in us, has accomplished any little service by our instrumentality, how speedily is it communicated in a spirit of pride and self-complacency. It is all right to speak of the Lord's grace, and to have our hearts filled with thankful adoration because of it; but this is very different from boasting of things connected with self.

David, however, kept the secret of his triumph over the lion and the bear concealed in his own bosom, and did not bring it forth until the fitting occasion; nor does he, even then, speak of himself as having achieved aught, but he simply says, "*The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*" Precious, self-renouncing faith! — faith that counts on God for everything, and trusts the flesh in nothing — faith which brings God into every difficulty, and leads us, with deepest thankfulness, to hide self, and give Him all the glory. May our souls know more and more of this blessed faith.

But it frequently needs much spirituality to detect the vast difference between the language of faith and the language of mere commonplace and formal religiousness. Saul assumed the garb and phraseology of religiousness; we have already seen much of this in his history, and we see it in his interview with David. Mere *religiousness* and *faith* here are seen in marked contrast. When David had made the clear and unequivocal statement of faith in the

presence and power of Jehovah, Saul added, "Go, *and the Lord be with thee*." But, ah, how little did he know what was involved in having the Lord with him. He *seemed* to trust the Lord, but *in reality* he trusted his armour. Had he understood what he said, why think of putting on armour? "The Lord be with thee" was in Saul's mouth a mere commonplace: it really meant nothing, for he had no idea of David's going *simply* with the Lord.

It is well to dwell upon, and distinctly point out, the evil of this — the evil of using words which, so far as we are concerned, mean nothing, but which involve a trifling with the Lord's name and truth. How often do we speak of trusting the Lord, when, in reality, we are leaning on some circumstance, or set of circumstances. How often do we speak of living by the day, in simple dependence upon God, when, if we judged the positive condition of our souls before God, we should find that we were looking to some human or earthly source of supply. This is a sad evil, and should be most carefully watched against.

It was just what Saul exhibited, when, having made use of the apparently devout expression, "The Lord be with thee," he proceeded to "arm David with his armour, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail." He had no other idea but that David was to fight in the usual way. No doubt, it was *professedly* in the name of the Lord; but he thought David *ought to use means*. But it happens that we frequently speak of using means and really shut out God; we profess to use means in dependence upon God, and, in reality, use the mere name of God in dependence upon the means. This is virtually, and according to the judgement of faith, to make a God of our means. Whether had Saul more confidence, in the Lord or in the armour? In the armour, no doubt; and so with all who do not truly walk by faith; it is the *means* they lean upon, and not upon God.

Perceive how strikingly all this bears upon the title of this little book, viz.; "The Life of Faith." We can hardly dwell upon any point in our subject more important than that suggested by the interesting scene on which we are immediately dwelling. The man of means, and the man of faith, are really before us; and we can at once perceive how far the latter proceeds in the use of means. Means are

to be used, no doubt, but only such means as are perfectly consistent with the full and blessed action of faith, and also with the untarnished glory of the God of all power and grace. Now David felt that Saul's armour and coat of mail were not such means, and he, therefore, refused them. Had he gone with them, the victory would not have been so manifestly the Lord's. But David had professed his faith in the Lord's deliverance, and not in human armour. True, means will be used; but let us take care that our means do not shut out God. {Faith, waits on God, allows Him to use what means soever He pleases. It does not ask Him to bless our means, but lets Him use His own.}

"And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him." Happy deliverance from the trammels of human policy! It has been observed, and most truly so, that David's trial was not when he met the giant, in actual conflict, but when he was tempted to use Saul's armour. Had the enemy succeeded in inducing him to go with that, all was gone; but, through grace, he rejected it, and thus left himself entirely in the Lord's hands, and we know what security he found there. This is faith. It leaves itself in God's hand.

{How often it happens that the child of God or the servant of Christ, harnessed with human devices for his work, finds himself burdened and hampered with these trammels to obedience and faith. Let them be shaken off, through grace, and the soul cast upon God finds at once the joy and liberty for the service and energy of faith. Ed.}

And may we not apply this with much profit to the case of a poor helpless sinner in reference to the forgiveness of his sins? I believe we may. Satan will tempt such an one to seek some addition to the finished work of Christ — something that will detract from the glory of the Son of God as the *only* Saviour of sinners. Now to such I would say, It matters not *what* you add to the work of Christ — you make it of no avail. If it might be permitted to add anything, surely circumcision would have been admitted, as being an ordinance of divine institution; yet the apostle says, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you

nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5: 2-4).

In a word, then, we must have Christ *alone*; we want no more, we can do with no less. If our works are to be put in with Christ's, then He is not sufficient. We dishonour the sufficiency of His atonement if we seek to connect aught of our own with it, just as David would have dishonoured the Lord by going forth to meet the Philistine champion in Saul's armour. Doubtless many a so-called prudent man would have condemned what seemed to him to be the rashness and foolhardiness of the stripling indeed, the more practised a man was in human warfare, the more likely would he have been to condemn the course adopted by the man of faith. But what of that? David knew in whom he had believed; he knew it was not rashness that was leading him on, but simple faith in God's willingness and ability to meet him in his need.

Few, perhaps, in Saul's army knew the weakness of David as realized by himself in that trying moment. Though all eyes were fastened upon him as one having much self-confidence, yet we know what it was that buoyed up his heart, and gave firmness to his step as he went forth to meet the terrible foe. We know that the power of God was there just as manifestly as when the waters of the sea were divided to make a way for the ransomed to pass over; and when faith brings the power of God into action, nothing can stand in the way for a moment.

Verse 40 shows us David's armour. "And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine." So, we see, David did use means; but what means! What contempt does David cast upon the ponderous armour of his enemy! How his sling must have contrasted with Goliath's spear like a weaver's beam! In fact, David could not have inflicted a deeper wound upon the Philistine's pride than by coming against him with such weapons. Goliath felt this. "Am I a dog?" said he. It mattered not, in the judgement of

faith, what he was, dog or giant; he was an enemy of the people of God, and David was meeting him with the weapons of faith.

“Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that *the Lord saveth not with sword and spear*: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands.

{For the important distinction between the expressions, "Lord" and "Gods — Jehovah and Elohim — see *Notes on the Book of Genesis* chap. 2.}

Here we have the true object of the man of faith, viz., that Israel and all the earth might have a glorious testimony to the power and presence of God in the midst of His people. If David had used Saul's armour it would not have been known that the Lord saved not by sword and spear — his warfare would just seem like any other; but the sling and the stone while giving little prominence to him that used it, gave the glory to Him from whom the victory came.

{It is interesting to observe David's address to Goliath. He does not say, "I come to thee *with a sling and a stone*." No; but, "in the name of the Lord of hosts." With him, it is not the means, but "the Lord of Hosts" on which he fixes his eyes.}

Faith ever honours God, and God ever honours faith. David, as has been already remarked, put himself into the hands of God, and the happy result of so doing was victory — full, glorious victory. "David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; *but there was no sword in the hand of David*." Magnificent triumph! Precious fruit of simple faith in God! How should it encourage the heart to cast away from it every carnal confidence, and to cling to the only true source of power.

David was made the happy instrument of delivering his brethren from the galling and terrifying threats of the uncircumcised Philistine; he had come into their midst, from the retirement of a shepherd's life, unknown and despised, though the anointed king of Israel; he had gone forth single-handed to meet the enemy of the congregation; he had laid him prostrate, and made a show of him openly; and all this, be it remembered, as *the servant* of God, and the servant of Israel, and in the energy of a faith which circumstances could not shake. It was a wondrous deliverance, gained by a single blow — no manoeuvring of armies — no skill of generals — no prowess of soldiers. No; a stone from the brook, slung by a shepherd's hand, settled the whole matter. It was the victory of faith.

"And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled." How vain are those hopes which are based on the perishable resources of flesh, in its greatest apparent strength and energy! Who that saw the giant and the stripling about to engage in conflict, but would have trembled for the latter? Who would have thought that all the massy armour would come to nothing before a sling and a stone? Yet see the end. The champion of the Philistines fell, and with him all their fondly-cherished hopes. "And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines." Yes: they might well shout, for God was manifestly gone out before them, to deliver them from the power of their enemies. He had been working powerfully by the hand of one whom they knew not, nor recognized, as their anointed king, but whose moral grace might well attract every heart.

But amidst the many thousands who beheld the victory, we read of one whose whole soul was drawn forth in ardent affection for the victor. The most thoughtless must have been struck with admiration of the victory; and, no doubt, it affected individuals differently. At such times, in a certain sense, "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed." Some would envy, some would admire; some would rest in the victory; some in the instrument; some would have their hearts drawn up to "the God of the armies of Israel" who had again come amongst them with a drawn sword in His hand. But

there was one devoted heart who was powerfully attracted to *the person* of the conqueror, and this was Jonathan.

"And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that *the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David*, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18: 1.) No doubt Jonathan participated more fully in the joy of all in the triumph of David; but there was more than this in it; it was not merely the triumph, but the person of the triumphant one that drew out the deep and ardent affections of Jonathan's soul. Saul might selfishly seek to retain the valiant David about his person, not because of love for his person, but simply to magnify himself. Not so Jonathan; he *loved* David. David had removed a load from his spirit, and filled up a great blank in his heart.

The challenge of the giant had, as it was each day repeated, developed the poverty of Israel. The eye might have ranged up and down the ranks in search of one able to meet the urgent need, but in vain. As the giant's vaunting words fell on their ears, *all* the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid." "All," yes; all fled, when they heard his words, and saw his size. Terrible was the blank, therefore, left in the heart on this solemn occasion; and when a beloved one appeared to fill up that blank, what wonder that Jonathan's whole soul was drawn out in genuine affection for that one. And be it remembered, that it was David himself, and not his work only, that touched Jonathan's heart. He admired his victory surely, but his person more. It is well to note this, and trace its striking application to the true David.

That we are warranted in making such application will, surely, not be questioned. The whole scene, from first to last, is too remarkable to admit of a question. In Goliath we behold the power of the enemy by which he held the soul in grievous bondage. From this power there was no means of deliverance within human reach. The challenge might be repeated from day to day — but all in vain. From age to age might the solemn verdict be heard throughout the myriads of Adam's fallen posterity, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement"; and the only response which man could yield was, like Israel's response in the valley of Elah, dismay — deep, deep dismay. "Through fear of death, all our

lifetime subject to bondage." This was man's response. The need was felt — the void unfilled. The human heart yearned for something, and yearned in vain. The claims of justice could not be met — death and judgement frowned in the distance, and man could only tremble at the prospect.

But blessed be the God of all grace, a deliverer has appeared — One mighty to save, the Son of God, the true David, the Anointed King of Israel and of all the earth. He has met the need, filled up the blank, satisfied the yearnings of the heart. But how? where? when? By His death on Calvary, in that terrible hour when all creation was made to feel the solemn reality of what was being transacted. Yes, the cross was the field where the battle was fought, and the victory won. There it was that the strong man had all his armour taken from him, and his house spoiled. There, justice had its utmost claims fully satisfied; there, the handwriting of ordinances, which was against us, was nailed to the tree. There, too, the curse of a broken law was forever obliterated by the blood of the Lamb, and the needs of a guilty conscience satisfied by the same.

"The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," settled everything for the believing soul. The poor trembling sinner may stand by and behold the conflict, and the glorious issue thereof, and behold all the power of the enemy laid low by one stroke of his glorious Deliverer, and feel the heavy burden rolled away from his struggling spirit. The tide of divine peace and joy may flow into his soul, and he may walk abroad in the full power of the emancipation purchased for him by the blood, and proclaimed to him in the gospel.

And shall not one thus delivered love *the Person* of the deliverer? — not merely the work, but the Person? Ah! how can it be otherwise? Who that has felt the real depth of his need, and groaned beneath the burden of his sins, can fail to love and adore that gracious One who has satisfied the one and removed the other? The work of Jesus is infinitely precious; it meets the sinner's need, and introduces the soul into a position in which it can contemplate the Person of Christ. In a word, then, the *work* of the Saviour is for the *sinner*; the *Person* of the Saviour is for the saint: what He has *done*, is for the former; what He *is*, is for the latter.

But there may be a mere formal following of Christ while the heart is cold and remains unacquainted with His person. In the sixth chapter of John, we find a multitude of persons following the Lord Jesus merely on selfish grounds, and He is constrained to tell them so: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." It was not for what He *was* they were seeking Him, but for mere carnal advantage; and hence, when He applies to their hearts the searching statement, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, there is no life in you," we read, "Many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Now, eating His flesh, and drinking His blood, is, in other words, the soul finding its food, its satisfaction, in the offering of Himself in sacrifice for us.

The whole Gospel of John is a development of the personal glory of the Incarnate Word who is presented to us as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Yet the natural heart could not receive Him thus, and therefore, "many went back, and walked no more with Him." The majority could not bear to have this truth pressed upon them. But harken to the testimony of one taught of God: "Peter answered and said, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Here we have the two things, viz.: what He *had* for them, what He *was* to them. He had eternal life to give, and He was the Son of the living God; by the former, the sinner is drawn to Him; by the latter, the saint is bound to Him. He not only meets all our necessities as sinners by His work, but also satisfies our affections and desires as saints by His Person.

This train of thought has been suggested by the deeply interesting and touching interview between David and Jonathan, when the conflict was over. The many thousands of Israel had raised the shout of triumph, and pursued the Philistines to reap the fruits of victory, while Jonathan was delighting himself in the person of the victor. "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." This was love, pure, simple, unaffected love — undivided occupation with an attractive object. Love strips itself for the sake of its object. David had forgotten

himself and put his life in jeopardy for God and the congregation, and now Jonathan would forget himself for David.

Reader, let us remember that love to Jesus is the spring of true Christianity. Love to Jesus makes us strip ourselves; and, we may say, that to strip self to honour Jesus is the fairest fruit of the work of God in the soul.

Talk they of morals? O Thou bleeding Lamb,

The great morality is love to Thee.

Very different were the feelings with which Saul regarded the person and work of David. He had not learnt to forget himself and rejoice to see the work done by another. It is the work of grace to be able to do this. We all naturally like to be or to do something — to be looked at and thought of. Thus it was with Saul; he was a self-important man, and was, therefore, little able to bear the songs of the maids of Israel: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul could not brook the idea of being second. He forgot how he had trembled at the voice of Goliath; though cowardly he would fain be counted brave and valiant. "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Terrible eye! — the eye of envy and bitter jealousy.

{It requires a very simple heart and single eye to be able to rejoice as unfeignedly in the fruit of another's labours as in that of our own hands. Had the glory of God and the good of His people filled Saul's heart, he would not have spent a thought upon the question as to the numbers attributed to him or to David. Alas, he sought his own glory. This was the secret of his envy and jealousy. Oh, what sacred rest, what true elevation, what perfect quietness of spirit flows from self-renunciation, such self-renunciation as results from having the heart wholly occupied with Christ! When we are honestly seeking the promotion of Christ's glory we shall not be careful as to the instrument.}

We shall have the occasion to trace the development both of Jonathan's love and Saul's hatred, as we proceed in this work, and must now trace the man of faith through other scenes.

1 Samuel 22-23 - Part 3 - THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

From amid the brilliant lustre of the valley of Elah, David passed into very different scenes in the household of Saul, where envious looks and heartless attempts upon his life were the only returns for the soothing notes of his harp, and the valiant exploits of his sling and his sword. Saul owed his continuance on the throne, under God, to David, yet the javelin was Saul's return. But the Lord in His mercy kept His dear servant, amid all the intricacies of his extremely difficult position. "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. Wherefore, when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them."

Thus was David, while anointed king of Israel, called upon to endure the hatred and reproach of the ruling power, though loved by all who were enabled to trace his moral worth. It was impossible that Saul and David could continue to dwell together; being of totally opposite principles, a separation must necessarily take place. David knew that he was anointed king, but Saul occupied the throne, and he was quite content to wait on God, and in meekness abide His time. Till then, the Spirit of Christ led him in the path of an exile. His way to the throne lay through multiplied sorrows and difficulties. He, like his blessed Master and antitype, was called to suffering first, and glory afterwards.

David would have served Saul to the end — he honoured him as "the Lord's anointed." If the moving of his finger would have set him on the throne, he would not have taken advantage of it. Of this we have the fullest evidence in his having twice saved Saul's life, when, to all appearance, the Lord had put him in his power. David waited simply upon God. Here was his strength, his elevation — his entire dependence. He could say, "My soul wait thou *only* upon God, for my expectation is from Him."

Hence we see that David was carried happily through all the snares and dangers of his path as a servant in the household and army of Saul. The Lord delivered him from every evil work, and preserved him unto that kingdom which He had prepared for him, and to which it was His purpose to raise him "after that he had suffered a while." David had, as it were, but just issued from the place of secret discipline and training, to appear in the battlefield, and, having accomplished his work there, he was called to take his place again on the form, to learn some deeper lessons in the school of Christ.

The Lord's lessons are often painful and difficult, because of the waywardness or indolence of our hearts; but every fresh lesson learned, every fresh principle imbibed, only fits us the more for all that is yet before us. Yet it is blessed to be the disciples of Christ, and to yield ourselves to His gracious discipline and training. The end will unfold to us the blessedness of such a place. Nor need we wait for the end; even now, the soul finds it most happy to be subject, in all things, to the Master. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. *Take My yoke upon you*, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and *ye shall find rest unto your souls*. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11: 28-30). There are, we may say, three rests spoken of in Scripture. *First*, is the rest which, as sinners, we find in the accomplished work of Christ. *Secondly*, the present rest, which, as saints, we find in being entirely subject to the will of God; this is opposed to *restlessness*. *Third by*, the rest that remains for the people of God.

Now, David knew much of the blessedness of the second of these rests, inasmuch as he was entirely subject to the counsel and will of God, in reference to the kingdom. He was prepared to wait for God's time, being assured that it was the best and wisest time. He could say,

My times are in Thy hand;

Father, I wish them there.

This subjection is truly desirable. It saves us from much anxiety of heart and restlessness. When we walk in the habitual conviction that God is making "all things to work together for our good," the spirit is most wonderfully tranquillised. We shall never set about planning for ourselves if we believe that God is planning for us; we shall be satisfied to leave *all* to Him. But alas, how often is it otherwise with us. How often do we vainly imagine that we can manage matters better than the blessed God. We may not say so in so many words; yet we virtually feel and act as if it were so. The Lord grant unto us a more subdued and confiding spirit. The supremacy of the will of God over that of the creature will characterise the millennial age; but the saint is called *now* to let the will of God rule him in all things.

It was this subjection of spirit that led David to give way in the matter of the kingdom, and to take his place in the lonely cave of Adullam. He left Saul, and the kingdom, and his own destinies in the hands of God, assured that all would yet be well. And, oh, how happy was it for him to find himself outside the unhealthy atmosphere of Saul's house, and from under the jealous glance of Saul's eye! He could breathe more freely in the cave, however it might seem in man's view, than in the household of Saul. So will it ever be; the place of separation is the freest and the happiest. The Spirit of the Lord was departed from Saul, and this was faith's warrant for separation from his person, while, at the same time, there was the fullest subjection to his power as the king of Israel. The intelligent mind will have no difficulty in distinguishing between these two things. The separation and the subjection should both be complete.

{The New Testament teaches the Christian to be subject to the powers that be, but it never contemplates the idea of his being in the place of power. Hence, there are no directions for a Christian as a king or a magistrate, though there is ample guidance for a Christian as a husband, a father, a master, or a servant. This speaks volumes.}

But we must view Saul not only in a secular but also in a religious point of view; and it was in reference to the religious element in his personal character and official capacity, that there was the greatest need for distinct and decided separation. Saul had

manifested throughout a desire to rule the conscience in religious matters; witness the scene in 1 Sam. 14, where, as we have seen, spiritual energy was cramped and hindered by Saul's religious rule. Now, when such rule is set up, there is no alternative but separation. When form without power prevails, the solemn word of the Holy Ghost is, "From such turn away." Faith never stops to inquire, Whither shall I "turn"? We are told what to turn away *from*, and we may be sure that, when we have yielded obedience to this, we shall be left at no loss as to the rest.

However, we shall see this principle in a much clearer light when we regard David in a typical point of view. In reality, David was forced into the place of separation, and thus, as one rejected of man, and anointed of God, we see him a type of Christ in His present rejection. David was, in principle, God's king, and as such experienced man's hostility, being driven into exile to avoid death. The cave of Adullam became the great gathering point for all who loved David and were wearied of the unrighteous rule of Saul. So long as David remained in the king's house, there was no call upon any one to separate; but the moment the rejected David took his place outside, no one could remain neutral; wherefore we read, "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men."

Here was, then, the line of distinction clearly marked. It was now David, or Saul. All who loved form, loved an empty name, a powerless office, continued to adhere to Saul; but all who were dissatisfied with these things, and loved the person of God's anointed king, flocked around him in the hold. The prophet, priest, and king were there — the thoughts and sympathies of God were there, and though the company assembled there must have presented a strange appearance to the carnal and the worldly, yet it was a company gathered round the person of David, and linked with his destinies. It was composed of men whose very condition seems to have driven them to David, but who were now deriving character and distinction from their nearness and devotedness to the person of the beloved. Away from Saul, away from all that marked the day of

his power, they could enjoy the sweetness of unhindered fellowship with the person of him who, though now rejected, was ere long to ascend the throne and wield the sceptre, to the glory of God and the joy of His people.

You may clearly perceive in David and his despised company a precious sample of the true David, and those who prefer companionship with Him to all the joys, the honours, and emoluments of earth. Those who had cast in their lot with David — what had they to do with the interests of Saul? They had found a new object, a new centre, and communion with God's anointed.

Nor was their place about the person of David dependent on, or connected with, what they had been. No; it mattered not what they had been; they were now the servants of David, and he was their captain. This gave them their character. They had cast in their lot with God's exile; their interest and his were identical. Happy company! Happy to escape from the rule and influence of Saul — still more happy to find themselves in companionship with God's anointed king. Their discontent, their distress, their debt, were all forgotten in their new circumstances. The grace of David was their present portion; the glory of David their future prospect.

Just so should it be with Christians now. Through grace, and the gentle leadings of the Father, we have found our way to Jesus — the anointed and rejected Jesus — now hidden with God. No doubt, we all had our respective features of character in the days of our guilt and folly — some discontented, some in distress, all in heavy debt to God — miserable, ruined, guilty, void of everything which could recommend us to Christ: yet God has led us to the feet of His dear Son, where we have found pardon and peace through His precious blood: Jesus has removed our discontent, alleviated our distress, cancelled our debt, brought us near His beloved person.

What return are we making for all this grace? Are we gathering, in ardent affection, round the Captain of our salvation? Are we weaned from the state of things under Saul? Are we living as those who are waiting for the day when our David shall mount the throne? Are our affections set upon things above? "If ye then be risen with Christ," says the apostle, "seek those things which are

above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3: 1-4).

It is greatly to be feared that few really enter into the true nature and practical consequences of their position as associated with the crucified and risen Jesus — few really enter into the depth and meaning of our Lord's words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"; or of the Spirit's word, "The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one." The measure of the saint's separation from the world is nothing less than Christ's; i.e., the principle of it. Looked at practically, alas, it is quite another thing; but in principle there is no difference. It is of vast importance to enforce this principle. The actual standing, calling and hopes of the Church as so feebly apprehended.

Yet the feeblest believer in Christ is, in God's view, as separate from all belonging to earth as Jesus. It is not a matter of attainment, but of our standing, through grace: not an object after which we must strive, but a point from which we must start. Many have been led astray by the idea that we must work up to a heavenly position by shaking off the things of earth. This is to begin at the wrong end. It is the same error, only in reference to another department of truth, as to assert that we must work up to a condition of justification, by mortifying the sins of the flesh. Now, we do not mortify self *in order to be* justified, but *because we are* justified; yea, dead and risen with Christ.

In like manner, we do not put away things of earth in order to become heavenly, but because we are so. Abram's calling was to leave kindred and go to Canaan; *our* calling is a heavenly one (of which Canaan was a type), and in proportion as we enter into it we will be separate from earth. But to make our standing the result of conduct, instead of conduct the result of standing, is a grievous error.

Ask a saint, really intelligent as to the heavenly calling, to give a reason for his standing apart from the present world: what will he

reply? Will he tell you that he does so in order to become heavenly? Nay. Will he tell you that it is because the present world is under judgement? Nay. No doubt *it is* under judgement, but this is not the true ground of separation. What then? "We have died, and our life is hid with Christ in God." — "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling," etc. Here we have the grand reason for the saint's present separation from the world. It does not matter what the world is, be it good or bad; he is not of it, though *in* it, as the place of his daily toil, conflict, and discipline.

Christian! ponder well your heavenly calling — it is the only thing that will give full deliverance from the power and influence of worldliness. Men may seek *abstraction* from the world in various ways, but there is only one in which to attain *separation* from it. Again, men may seek to render themselves *unearthly* in various ways; there is only one way in which we can become really *heavenly*. Abstraction is not separation; nor is unearthliness to be mistaken for heavenliness. The monastic system illustrates very fully the distinction between these things. A sincere monk is unearthly, in a certain sense, but by no means heavenly; he is unnatural, but by no means spiritual; he is abstracted from the world, but by no means separated from it.

The Christian's heavenly calling is in virtue of *what* Christ is, and *where* He is. The heart instructed by the Holy Ghost as to the meaning of Heb. 2: 11, finds the reason and power of his deliverance from the principles, habits, pursuits, feelings, and tendencies of this present age. The Lord Jesus has taken His place on high as Head of the body, the Church; and the Holy Ghost has come down to lead all the foreknown and predestinated members of Christ into living fellowship with the living Head, now rejected from earth, and hidden with God. Hence in the gospel, as preached by Paul, the remission of sins is inseparably connected with the heavenly calling, inasmuch as he preached the unity of the one body on earth with its Head in Heaven. He preached justification, not merely as an abstract thing, but as the result of what the Church is, as one with Christ, who is now at the right hand of God, Head over all things to His Church, angels and principalities being made

subject to Him. Paul preached remission of sins, no doubt, but he preached it all with the fullness, depth, power, and energy which the doctrine of the Church imparts to it.

The Epistle to the Ephesians teaches us not only that God can forgive sinners, but far more than this: it unfolds to us the wondrous truth that believers are members of the body of Christ; "for we," says the apostle, "are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." Again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Again, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." These passages present far more than mere remission of sins. To be the bride of the Lamb is a very much higher, very much more glorious thing than only to have our sins forgiven.

Yet 'tis not that we know the joy

Of cancell'd sin alone,

But, happier far, Thy saints are call'd

To share Thy glorious throne.

Just so, the blessed God has gone beyond all man's thoughts in His mode of dealing with the Church. He has called us, not only to walk here below in the full sense of His pardoning love, but also to know the love of Christ to His body, the Church, and the high and holy dignity of that Church, as seated in the heavenlies.

My reader may perhaps inquire what has the cave of Adullam to do with the Church's place in the heavens? It has to do with it only so far as it illustrates the present place of rejection into which Christ has entered, and which all must know who enjoy fellowship with Him. Of course, neither David nor his men knew anything

about the heavenly calling as the Church now knows it. We may frequently discover in Old Testament Scriptures, foreshadowings of the heavenly calling, in the character, walk, and circumstances of certain prominent persons which are introduced to our notice.

But the heavenly calling, properly speaking, was not known until the Lord Jesus took His seat on high, and the Holy Ghost came down to baptize believers, Jew and Gentile, into one body; then the heavenly calling was developed in all its power and fullness. This truth was peculiarly committed to Paul; it was an essential part of the mystery committed to him, and was embodied in these words, "Why persecutest thou *ME*?" Saul was persecuting the saints, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him in heavenly glory, and told him that these saints were part of Himself — His members on earth. Henceforth this became Paul's great thesis; in it was involved the oneness of the Church with Christ, and therefore the heavenly calling of the Church.

Observe that all this was not merely an admission of the Gentile into the Jewish fold.* No, it was taking both Jew and Gentile out of their circumstances in nature, and setting them down in new circumstances — new to both. The work of the Cross was needful to break down the middle wall of partition, and to make of twain one new man, i.e., to make of Jew and Gentile a new heavenly man, separated from earth and its aims. The present place of Christ in the heavens is connected with His rejection by Israel, during what is called the Church period, and serves to bring out still more distinctly the heavenly character of the Church of God. She belongs to Heaven, and is called to manifest on earth the living energy of the Holy Ghost who dwells in her.

{*I would say a word here, on the opening verses of John 10. The Lord Jesus presented Himself at the door of the Jewish fold, and having obtained entrance, called out His sheep that were therein, and then He says, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock, and one Shepherd." It is strange that the translators should have rendered this "one fold," when the word fold actually occurs in the same verse. Nor is the distinction unimportant. A fold is an enclosure for the separation and safety of the sheep; hence the word

is properly applied to the Jewish economy, Now, however, it is no longer a fold — an earthly arrangement — a penning up of sheep here below. But the heavenly Shepherd has called forth His Jewish sheep from the earthly fold, and His Gentile sheep from the dark mountains of this wide world, and made them one flock, giving them freedom, and committed them into the Father's hand. Thus we see the difference between the words "fold" and "flock."}

Thus, as David's men were withdrawn from all connection with Saul's system by virtue of their association with him, so all those who are led by the Spirit to know their oneness with the rejected Jesus, must feel themselves dissociated from present things, by reason of that blessed oneness with Him.

Hence, if you ask a heavenly man why he does not mix himself up with the plans and pursuits of this age, his reply will be, Because Christ is at the right hand of God, and I am identified with Him. He has been cast out by this world and I take my place with Him, apart therefore from its objects and pursuits. All who understand the true nature of the heavenly calling will walk in separation from the world; but those who do not, will just take their portion here, and live as others.

Many, alas, are satisfied with the mere knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, and never think of going further. They have passed through the Red Sea, it may be, but manifest no desire to cross the Jordan, and eat the old corn of the land of promise. Just as it was in the day of David's rejection; many, though Israelites, did not cast in their lot in rejection with him. It was one thing to be an Israelite; it was another thing to be with David in the hold. Even Jonathan was not there; he still adhered to the old system of things. Though loving David as his own soul, he lived and died in companionship with Saul. True, he ventured to speak *for* David, and sought his company when he could. He had stripped himself to clothe David; yet he did not cast in his lot *with* him. And, consequently, when the names and the deeds of David's worthies are heralded by the Holy Ghost, we look in vain for the name of the affectionate Jonathan; when the devoted companions of David's exile were mustering round his throne in the sunshine of his royal countenance, poor Jonathan was mingled with the dust, having

ingloriously fallen, on mount Gilboa, by the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines!

Oh that all who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ may seek a more decided identification with Him in this the time of His rejection! The citizens have sent a message after Him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us"; and shall we go and associate ourselves with those citizens to forward their Christ-rejecting plans? God forbid. May our hearts be with Him where He is. May we know the hallowed fellowship of the cave of Adullam, where the Prophet, Priest, and King are to be found, embodied in the beloved Person of Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

We cannot walk with Saul and David at the same time. We cannot hold Christ and the world — we must take our choice. The Lord grant us grace to reject the evil and choose the good, remembering the solemn words of the apostle: "This is a faithful saying; for if we be *dead with Him*, we shall also *live with Him*; if we *suffer*, we shall also *reign* with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us." This is the time of suffering, the time for enduring afflictions and hardness; we must wait for the time of rest and glory.

David's men were called, by reason of their association with him, to undergo much toil and fatigue, but love made all light and easy to them; and their names and exploits were recorded and faithfully remembered when David was at rest in his kingdom. None were forgotten. The twenty-third chapter of Second Samuel will furnish the reader with the precious catalogue, and will, no doubt, lead his mind onward to the time when the Lord Christ shall reward *His* faithful servants — those who from love to His person, and by the energy of His Spirit, have performed acts of service for Him in the time of His rejection. These acts may not be seen, known, or thought of by men; but Jesus knows them, and will publicly declare them from the throne of His glory. Who would ever have known the acts of David's worthies if the Holy Ghost had not recorded them? Who would have known of the three who drew water from the well of Bethlehem? Who would have known of the slaying of a lion in a pit, in the time of snow?

Just so now: many a heart throbs with love to the Person of the Saviour, unknown to all; and many a hand may be stretched forth in service to Him, unobserved by human eye. It is sweet to think it is so, specially in an age of cold formality like the present — sweet to think of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Some there are, alas, who are not only indifferent to His beloved Person, but who even go as far as to traduce Him — to rob Him of His dignity, and make Him little better than Elias, or one of the prophets. But we shall not dwell upon these; we have, thank God, a happier theme, and we shall, with His help, pursue it.

We shall think of those valued men who jeopardized their lives for the sake of their captain, and who, the instant he uttered his desire, were ready, at all cost, to gratify it. Love never pauses to calculate. It was quite sufficient for those worthies to know that David longed for a drink from the well of Bethlehem, and they procured it at any cost to themselves: "And these three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord."* Lovely scene! Sweet sample of what the Church ought to be! Loving not her life unto the death for Christ's sake.

{*There is something peculiarly touching and beautiful in the above scene, whether we contemplate the act of the three mighty men in procuring the water for David, or David's act in pouring it out to the Lord. It is evident that David discerned, in an act of such uncommon devotedness, a sacrifice which none but the Lord Himself was worthy to receive. The odour of such a sacrifice was far too fragrant for him to interrupt it in its ascent to the throne of the God of Israel. Wherefore he, very properly and gracefully, allows it to pass him by, in order that it might go up to the One who alone was worthy to receive it, or able to appreciate it. All this reminds us, forcibly, of that beautiful compendium of Christian devotedness set forth in Phil. 2: 17, 18: "Yea, and if I be poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all: for this cause do ye also joy and rejoice with me." In this passage, the apostle represents the Philippian saints in their character as priests, presenting a "sacrifice" and performing a priestly ministration to

God and such was the intensity of his self — forgetting devotedness, that he could rejoice in his being poured out as a drink offering upon their sacrifice, so that all might ascend, in fragrant odour, to God. The Philippians laid a sacrifice on God's altar, and the apostle was poured out upon it, and all went up to God as an odour of sweet smell. It mattered not who put the sacrifice on the altar, or who was poured out thereupon, providing that God received what was acceptable to Him. This, truly is a divine model for Christian devotedness. Would that we had grace to form our ways according to it. There would, then, be far less of "my sayings," and "my doings," and "my goings."}

Oh that the Holy Ghost may kindle within us a flame of ardent love to the person of Jesus — may He unfold to our souls more of the divine excellencies of His person, that we may know Him to be the fairest amongst ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and be able to say with a true worthy, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3: 8).

Part 4 NABAL AND ABIGAIL 1 Samuel 25

It is interesting to observe, as we pass from stage to stage of David's history, how different individuals were affected toward his person, and the consequent position assumed in reference to him. It required energy of faith to discern, in the despised outcast, the future king of Israel. In this chapter we are presented with two striking examples of persons thus variously affected in reference to David's person and career.

"There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats; and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal." This Nabal was an Israelite, and he appears in marked contrast with David, who, though anointed king of Israel, had not where to lay his head, but was a wanderer from mountain to mountain, and from cave to cave. Nabal was a selfish man, with no sympathy for David. If he had blessings, he had them for himself; if he was "great," he had no idea of sharing

his greatness with any one else, and least of all with David and his companions.

And David heard *in the wilderness* that Nabal did shear his sheep. And David sent out ten young men, and David said to the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name," etc. David was in the wilderness; this was his place. Nabal was surrounded by all the comforts of life. The former owed all his sorrows and privations to what he was; the latter owed all his possessions and enjoyments to what he was.

Now, we generally find that where advantages are derived from religious distinction and profession, much selfishness exists. The profession of truth, if not connected with self-denial, will be connected with positive self-indulgence; and hence we may observe at the present day a determined spirit of worldliness connected with the very highest profession of truth. This is a grievous evil. The apostle was made to feel the anguish of it, even in his time. "Many," says he, "walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of *the cross of Christ*: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, *who mind earthly things*" (Phil. 3: 18-19). Observe, they are the enemies of the *Cross* of Christ. They do not throw off any semblance of Christianity; far from it. "Many *walk*." This expression shows a measure of profession.

The persons here pictured would, doubtless, be much offended were any to refuse them the appellation of Christians; but then they do not want to take up the *Cross*; they desire not practical identification with a crucified Christ; whatever amount of professed Christianity can be had apart from all self-denial is welcome to them, but not one jot beyond this. "Their God is their belly, and they mind earthly things." Ah, how many must plead guilty to the charge of minding earthly things! It is easy to make a profession of the religion of Christ, while Christ Himself is unknown, and the cross of Christ is hated. It is easy to take up the name of Jesus into the lips, and walk in self-indulgence and love of the world, which the human heart knows so well how to estimate. All this finds its full illustration in the person of the churlish Nabal, who having shut himself up in the midst of his luxuries and wealth, cared not for

God's anointed, nor felt for him in the season of his painful exile and sojourn in the wilderness.

What was his reply to David's touching appeal? "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" Here was the secret of this worldly man's estrangement of heart; *he did not know him*; had he known him, it would have been a very different matter: but he neither knew who he was nor whence he was; he did not know that he was railing on the Lord's anointed, and casting from him, in his selfish folly, the privilege of ministering to the need of the future king of Israel.

The moral of all this is deeply instructive. It demands the clear vision of faith to enable any one to discern the true glory of Christ, and cleave to Him in the time of His rejection. It is one thing to be a Christian, as people say, and another thing to confess Christ before men. Indeed, one can hardly find anything more selfish than that condition of heart which would lead us to take all that Jesus has to give, and yield Him nothing in return. "Provided I am saved, all the rest is unessential." This is the secret thought of many a heart, and if thrown into a more honest form would be this, "If I am sure of salvation, it matters little about the glory of Christ."

This was just Nabal's mode of acting; he reaped all the advantage he could from David; but the moment David put in his claim for sympathy and aid, his worldly spirit developed itself. "One of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness, to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep." This was all very well. Nabal could well understand the value of David's *protection*, though he cared not for David's *person*. So long as David's men were a wall to his possessions, he would tolerate them; but when they would become a burden, they were rejected and railed upon.

Now, as might be expected, Nabal's acting was directly contrary to Scripture, as his spirit was decidedly contrary to the spirit of its divine Author. It is written in the fifteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thy hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee." Precious grace! How like God. How unlike Nabal! Grace would keep the heart wide open to every object of need; whereas selfishness would close it against every applicant. Nabal ought to have obeyed the word, independently of his knowledge of David; but his selfishness was too deep a character to allow of his obedience to the Lord's word, or his love to the Lord's anointed.

However, Nabal's selfishness led to very important results; it led, in David's case, to the exhibition of much that was calculated to humble him in the presence of God. He is here seen to come down from the high elevation which usually characterised him, through the grace of God. No doubt, it was deeply trying to meet with such base ingratitude from one to whom he had been a wall of defence; it was galling, too, to be reproached on the very ground of those circumstances in which faithfulness had called him; to be accused of breaking away from his master at the very time that he was being hunted as a partridge through the mountains. All this was hard to bear, and, in the first ebullition of feeling, David gives expression to words which would not bear the examination of the sanctuary. "*Gird ye on every man his sword*," was not just the language which we should have expected from one who had hitherto walked in such a meek and gentle spirit. The Scripture just quoted presents the resource of the poor brother, viz.: to "cry unto the Lord," not to draw his sword for revenge.

Nabal's selfishness could never have been remedied by the sword of David, nor would faith ever have adopted such a course.

We do not find David acting thus in reference to Saul; he left him entirely to God, and even when induced to cut off the skirt of his robe, his heart smote him. Why did he not act thus toward Nabal? Because he was not in communion; he was off his guard, and the enemy took advantage of him. Nature will ever lead us to vindicate ourselves, and resent every injury. The heart will secretly murmur, "He had no right to treat me thus; I really cannot bear it, nor do I think I ought to do so." This may be so, but the man of faith at once rises above all such things; he sees God in everything; the jealousy of Saul, the folly of Nabal, all is looked at as coming from the hand of God, and met in the secret of His holy presence. The instrument is nothing to faith; God is in all. This gives real power to move on through all sorts of circumstances. If we do not trace God in everything, we shall be constantly ensnared.

We shall have occasion, as we proceed with our subject, to trace this principle more fully, and shall now turn to another character introduced to our notice in this instructive chapter. This is Abigail, the wife of Nabal, "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." A noble testimony, surely, and one which shows that grace can manifest itself in the most untoward circumstances. The house of the churlish Nabal must have been a withering scene to one like Abigail; but she waited on God, and, as we shall see, was not disappointed.

The case of this remarkable woman is full of encouragement and instruction to all who may find themselves, cramped and hindered by unavoidable connections and associations. To all such the history of Abigail simply says, Be patient, wait on God, do not suppose yourself void of all opportunity for testimony. The Lord may be much glorified by meek subjection, and will, assuredly, give relief and victory in the end. True, some may have to reproach themselves for having formed such connections, or entered into such associations; but even so, if the folly and evil are really felt, confessed, and judged before God, and the soul brought into an attitude of thorough subduedness, the end will be blessing and peace.

In Abigail we see one who was actually used to correct no less a personage than David himself. It may be that her course, up to the

time at which the sacred historian introduces her to our notice, had been marked by much that was painful and trying; indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise, associated with such an one as Nabal. Time, however, brought to light the grace that was in her. She had suffered in obscurity, and was now about to be raised to an unusually high elevation. Few had seen her patient service and testimony; but many beheld her exaltation. The burden which she had borne in secret was about to drop off before many witnesses. The preciousness of Abigail's service did not consist in her having saved Nabal from the sword of David, but in keeping David from drawing the sword at all.

"Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him; and he hath requited me evil for good." This was terrible! And David was rashly taking himself out of the place of dependence — the only happy, the only holy place. Nor was it on behalf of the congregation of the Lord. No, it was to avenge himself on one who had treated him badly. Sad mistake! Happy was it for him, that there was an Abigail in the house of Nabal who was about to be used of God to keep him from answering a fool according to his folly. This was just what the enemy desired. Nabal's selfishness was used by Satan to ensnare David, and Abigail was the Lord's instrument to deliver him.

It is well when the man of God can detect Satan's working; to be able so to do, he must be much in the presence of God, for there alone can he find light and spiritual power to enable him to cope with such a foe. When out of communion, the soul becomes distracted by looking at secondary causes, and subordinate agents, just as David was distracted by looking at Nabal. Had he paused to view the matter calmly before God, we should not have had such words as, "In vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness"; he would have passed on, and left "this fellow" to himself. Faith imparts real dignity to the character, and superiority over the petty circumstances of this transient scene. Those who know themselves as pilgrims and strangers, will remember that the sorrows as well as the joys of this life are evanescent, and they will not be inordinately affected by either the one or the other. "Passing

away," is written on everything; the man of faith must, therefore, look upwards and onward.

Now Abigail, by the grace of God, delivered David from the unhappy influence of the *present*, by leading his soul onward into the *future*: we learn this from her exquisite address to him. "And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be; and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now, therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself *with thine own hand*, now let thine enemies and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal . . . for *the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord*, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.

"Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul; *but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God*; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, *when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to ad the good that Be hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel*, that this shall be not grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself; but when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid."

We can hardly conceive anything more touching than this address; every point in it was calculated to touch the heart. She presents to him the evil of seeking to avenge himself; the weakness and folly of the object of his revenge, — she reminds him of his proper occupation, viz., "fighting *the Lord's battles*. This must have brought home to his heart the humiliating circumstances in which Abigail met him, even rushing on to fight *his own battle*.

However, perceive that the leading point in this address is the special reference to the future. "The Lord *will* certainly make my lord a sure house." "The soul of my lord *shall* be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." "When the Lord *shall* have done to my lord," etc.; "and *shall* have appointed thee ruler over Israel." All these allusions to David's future blessing and glory were eminently calculated to withdraw his heart from his present grievance. The sure house, the bundle of life, and the kingdom, were far better than Nabal's flocks and herds; and in the view of these glories, David could well afford to leave him to his portion, and his portion to him.

To the heir of a kingdom, a few sheep could have but little attraction; and one who knew that he had the anointing oil of the Lord upon his head might easily bear to be called a runaway servant. All these things Abigail knew — knew as matters of faith. She knew David, and knew his high destinies. By faith she recognized in the despised outcast the future king of Israel. Nabal knew not David. He was a man of the world, swallowed up with present things. With him there was nothing more important, nothing more influential, than "my bread, my flesh, my shearers"; it was all self; there was no room for David or his claims. This might be expected from such an one; but surely it was not for David to go down from his elevation to grapple with a poor worldling about his perishable possessions. Ah, no; the kingdom should have filled his eye, and engaged his thoughts, and lifted his spirit above all lower influences.

Look at the Master Himself, as He stood at the bar of a poor worm — the creation of His own hand — how did He conduct Himself? Did He call upon His little band of followers to gird on every man his sword? Did He say of the man who dared to sit as His judge, "In vain have I imparted unto this fellow all he is, and all he has?" No; He looked above and beyond Pilate, Herod, the chief priests, and scribes. He could say, "The cup which My *Father* hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" This kept His spirit tranquil, while, at the same time, He could look forward into the future, and say, "*Hereafter* shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Here was real power over present things. The millennial kingdom, with all its untold joys,

with all its heights and depths of glory, glistened in the distance with everlasting light and brilliancy, and the eye of the Man of Sorrows rested upon it, in that dark hour when the scoffs and sneers, the taunts and reproaches of guilty sinners were falling upon His blessed person.

Dear Christian reader, this is our model; thus ought we to meet the trials and difficulties, the reproach, obloquy, and desertion of this present time. We should view *ad* in the light of "*hereafter*." "Our light affliction," says an eminent sufferer, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Again, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have *suffered* these things, and to enter into His *glory*?" Yes; suffering must come first and glory afterwards; and any one who, by his own hand, would seek to take off the edge of present suffering and reproach, proves that the kingdom is not filling the vision of his soul — that *now* is more influential with him than "*hereafter*."

How we ought to bless our God for having opened to us such a vista of glory in the ages to come! How it enables us to tread, with a buoyant step, our rugged path through the wilderness! How it lifts us above the things which engross the children of this world!

We're not of the world, which fadeth away,

We're not of the night, but children of day;

The chains that once bound us by Jesus are riven,

We're strangers on earth, and our home is in Heaven.

May we prove the sacred reality of this more, as we pass along through "this vale of tears." Truly the heart would sink and the spirit faint, were we not sustained by hope — even the hope of glory, which, thank God, maketh not ashamed, for the Spirit is the earnest of it in our hearts.

In pursuing the narrative of David and Abigail a little further, we have a still more striking example of the vast difference between the child of nature and the child of faith. Abigail returned from her interview with David, and found Nabal "very drunken; wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass, about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died." What a sad picture of a man of the world ! Sunk in intoxication during the night, and when the morning dawned, struck with terror, pierced by the arrow of death.

How solemnly like the multitudes whom the enemy has succeeded, in every age, in alluring and intoxicating with the perishing joys of a world which lies under the curse of God, and awaits the fire of His judgement. "They that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night;" but, ah! the morning is at hand, when the wine (apt symbol of this world's joy) shall have altogether evaporated — the feverish excitement in which Satan now involves the spirits of the men of this world shall have calmed down, and then comes the stern reality of an eternity of misery — unspeakable misery, in company with Satan and his angels.

Nabal did not even meet David face to face; yet the very thought of his avenging sword filled his soul with deadly fear. How much more terrible will it be to meet the gaze of a despised and rejected Jesus! Then the Abigails and the Nabals will find their respective places; those who had known and loved the true David, and those who had not. God, in His mercy, grant that my reader may be amongst the happy number of the former.

I would only observe, further, that the interesting narrative of this chapter gives us a striking picture of the Church and the world, as a whole; the one united to the king, and associated with Him in His glory; the other plunged in irretrievable ruin. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on

fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3: 11-14).

Such are the soul-stirring, momentous facts presented to us throughout the Book of God, in order to detach our hearts from present things, and bind them in genuine affection to those objects and prospects which stand connected with the person of the Son of God. Nor will aught else, save the deep and positive conviction of the reality of these things, produce such effects.

We know the intoxicating power of this world's schemes and operations; we know how the human heart is borne away, as upon the surface of a rapid current, when such things are presented: schemes of improvement, commercial operations, political movements — aye, and popular religious movements too all these things produce upon the human mind an effect similar to that produced by Nabal's wine, so that it is almost useless to announce the stern facts presented in the above solemn quotation. Still, they must be announced, must be reiterated, "and so much the more, as we see the day approaching." "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." "All these things shall be dissolved." "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." Such is the prospect presented to all who, like Nabal, surcharged with "surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life," have rejected the claims and appeals of Jesus.

The world is being prepared, with inconceivable rapidity, for the introduction of that one who, by the energy of Satan, will head up all its institutions, embody all its principles, concentrate all its energies. Let but the last elect one be gathered out, the last member be incorporated into the body of Christ by the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost, the last stone be set in its appointed places in the temple of God, and then shall the salt be removed, which now preserves the world from corruption; the barrier presented by the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church shall be taken out of the

way, and then comes forth "the lawless one" on the stage of this world, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Surely these things ought to check the career of the men of this world, and lead them, with solemnized minds, to "consider *their latter end*." "The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation." Precious word! Most precious! But let it not be abused; let it not be mistaken for "*slackness*." "The Lord waits to be gracious to *sinner*s, not to connive at *sin*."

However, as has been already observed, it is almost useless to speak to men about the *future* who are wholly engrossed with the *present*.

Blessed be God, there are some who have ears to hear the testimony about the kindness and grace of Jesus, as well as about His coming judgement. Thus it was with Abigail; she believed the truth about David, and acted accordingly; and all who believe the truth about Jesus will be found separating themselves diligently from this present world.

1 Samuel 30 - Part 5 – ZIKLAG

In dwelling upon a history such as that now before us, which manifestly presents much failure and infirmity, it is well for us to keep in memory what we ourselves are, lest we be found pointing out the lapses of others in a spirit of self-complacency. The divine penman has set before us, with unflinching fidelity, all the imperfections of those whose history He records. His object is to present God to the soul in all the fullness and variety of His resources, and in all His competency to meet the helpless sinner in his very deepest need. He has not written the history of angels, but of men — men "of like passions with us"; and this is what makes

Old Testament narratives so exceedingly instructive to us; we are presented with facts which speak to the heart; we are conducted through scenes and circumstances which unfold to us, with touching simplicity, the hidden springs of our nature, and also the hidden springs of grace.

We learn that man is the same in every age: in Eden, in Canaan, in the Church, in millennial glory, he is proved to be made of the same humbling materials; but we learn also, for our joy and encouragement, that God is the same — "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" — "Patient, gracious, powerful, holy" — patient, to bear with our grievous and manifold provocations; gracious, to blot out our oft-repeated sins, and restore our wandering souls; powerful, to deliver us out of Satan's entangling snares, and from the energy of nature and the world; holy, to execute judgement in His house, and to chasten His sons, that they may be partakers of His holiness. Such is the God with whom we have to do; and we see the wondrous unfoldings of His character in the deeply-interesting sketches with which the Old Testament history abounds, and in none, perhaps, more than in that now before us.

Few characters exhibit more variety of experience than David. He truly knew the depths and heights which mark the course of the man of faith. At one moment, we find him giving forth from his harp the most sublime strains; at another, pouring forth the sorrows of a defiled conscience and a wounded spirit. This variety of experience rendered David a fit subject for illustrating the varied grace of God. It is ever thus. The poor prodigal would never have known such high communion, had he not known the humiliating depths of the far country. The grace which decked him in the best robe would not have shone so brightly, had he not been clad in filthy rags.

God's grace is magnified by man's ruin; and the more keenly the ruin is felt, the more highly the grace is valued. The elder brother never got a kid that he might make merry with his friends; and why? Because he imagined he had earned it. "Lo," says he, "these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." Vain man! How could he expect the ring, the robe, or the fatted calf? Had he obtained them, they would have been but

the trappings of self-righteousness, and not the ornaments with which grace decks the believing sinner.

Thus was it with Saul and David. Saul never knew his need as David knew it, nor have we any record of such flagrant sins in his case; at least, what man would pronounce flagrant. Saul was the outwardly moral and religious man, but, withal, a self-righteous man; hence we have such expressions as these, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord" — "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me." How could this man value grace? Impossible. A heart unbroken, a conscience unconvinced, can never enter into the meaning of the term Grace. How different was it with David! He felt his sins, groaned under them, confessed them, judged them, in the presence of God whose grace had blotted them all out for ever. There is a great difference between a man ignorant of his sins and walking in self-complacency, and one deeply conscious of his sins, yet happy in the full forgiveness of them.

The above train of thought introduces us to the circumstances connected with David in Ziklag of the Philistines — circumstances which fully manifest human infirmity and divine grace and mercy.

"And David said *in his heart*, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." This was David's second visit to the land of the Philistines. In 1 Sam. 21 we read, "And David arose and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath." Here we find David really taking himself out of the hands of God, and putting himself into the hands of Achish. He leaves the place of dependence, and goes into the very midst of the enemies of God and of Israel. And, be it remarked, he has in his hand the very sword of the Philistine champion. Nor is it to act in his true character as the servant of God; this would have been happy indeed; but no; he goes to act the madman, in the presence of those before whom he had so recently acted as the champion of Israel.

"The servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances,

saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" The Philistines recognized David's true character as "king of the land" — the slayer of ten thousands; they imagined that he could not possibly act otherwise than as their enemy. Little were they able to enter into the moral condition of his soul at that extraordinary stage of his history; little did they think that the slayer of Goliath had fled to them for protection from the hand of Saul. The world cannot understand the vicissitudes of the life of faith. Who that had seen David in the valley of Elah could ever suppose that he would so soon fear to avow with boldness the results of that faith with which God had endowed him? Who could have thought that with Goliath's sword in his hand he could tremble to avow himself the victor of Goliath? Yet so it was. "David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard."

Thus must it ever be when a saint deserts the path of simple dependence upon God and strangership in the world. The "behaviour" must be "changed," the real character abandoned, and instead thereof a course is adopted which is marked by positive deceit before God and folly before the world. This is most sorrowful. A saint should always maintain his dignity — the dignity which flows from the consciousness of the presence of God. But the moment faith gives way, the power of testimony is gone, and the man of faith is despised as a "madman."

When David "said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul," he forsook the only path of real power. Had he continued as a homeless wanderer through the mountains, he would never have presented such a melancholy picture in the view of the servants of Achish — he would never have been pronounced a madman. Achish would not have dared to call David by such a name in the valley of Elah! No, nor in the cave of Adullam; but, alas, David had put himself into the power of this stranger, and therefore he should either suffer for his past faithfulness, or give all up, and pretend to be a fool in their eyes. They rightly judged him to be the king of the land, but he, afraid of the consequences of maintaining

such a high dignity, denied his kingship, and became a fool. How frequently may we trace the working of this same evil in the walk of Christians!

How frequently may we see a man who, by his past actings in the energy of the Spirit of God, has attained a very high position in the thoughts, not only of his brethren, but even of the children of this world, and yet, when such an one gets out of communion, he is really afraid to maintain his position; and, at the very moment when those without are looking only for an unbending and unqualified testimony against their ways, he changes his behaviour, and instead of being esteemed and revered, he is actually despised. We should most carefully guard against this; it can only be effectually avoided by walking in the full and blessed consciousness of God's sufficiency. So long as we feel that God is sufficient for *all* our need, we are entirely independent of the world; if it be not thus with us, we shall just compromise the truth of God, and deny our real character as heavenly men.

How completely must David have lost the sense of God's sufficiency when he could say, "There *is nothing better* for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Nothing better for a man of faith than to go back to the world for refuge! Strange confession! The confession of one who had allowed circumstances to come between his soul and God. When we slip off the narrow path of faith, we are liable to run into the wildest extremes; and nothing can more forcibly exhibit the contrast between one looking at God and one looking at circumstances, than David in the valley of Elah and David scrabbling on the doors of the Philistine king. The contrast is full of solemn instruction and warning. It is well calculated to teach us what we are, and how little the best of us can be depended upon.

Ah! my dear Christian reader, what are we? Poor, failing, stumbling creatures; prone, at every turn in our path, to wander into error and evil — prone to forsake the Rock of Ages, and lean upon the broken reeds of the world — prone to forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Truly we have need, deep need, to walk humbly, watchfully, and prayerfully, before our God — deep need to utter

David's own prayer, continually, "Uphold me according unto Thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe; and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually." We need to have our feet made as hinds' feet, so that we may walk on the high and slippery places through which our path lies. Nothing short of grace divine can enable us to pursue a course of steady devotedness: for, if left to ourselves, there is no extreme of evil into which we may not run. They alone are safe whom God keeps in the hollow of His hand.

Truly happy is it for us to have to do with one who is able to bear with us in all our waywardness, and able also to restore and revive our souls when faint and withering under the influence of the atmosphere of evil around us. God forbid that we should make any other use of what we may term the Ziklag portion of David's history, save to apply it to our own hearts before God, and use it as a matter of solemn and soul-searching warning; for though it may be said that there is a wide difference between the standing and privileges of David and those of the Church of God now, yet, in every age and dispensation, nature is the same; and we seriously wrong our own souls if we fail to learn a wholesome lesson from the falls of one so high up in the school of Christ as David. Dispensations differ, no doubt, in their great leading features; but there is a wonderful analogy in God's principles of discipline at all times, let the standing of His people differ as it may.

In following David, in his further sojourn in the land of the Philistines, we only find fresh cause of humiliation. He obtains the grant of Ziklag, where he sojourns for sixteen months, during which period, though free from all fear with respect to Saul, he was at a distance from God and from Israel. It is, in one sense, a very easy matter to get out of a place of trial; but then we get out of a place of blessing also. It would have been much happier for David to have remained in a position which left him exposed to Saul, while, at the same time, he enjoyed the protection of the God of Israel, than to seek safety from the arm of the king of Gath. However, when the pressure of trial is upon us, the thought of relief is sweet, and we are in danger of seeking relief in our own way.

The enemy always has a by-road open to the man of faith. He had an Egypt for Abraham, and a Ziklag for David; and now he has the world, in all its varied forms, for us. "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." It is the opportunity to return that proves the genuine fixedness of purpose to go forward. The Lord leaves His people free, in order that they may "*declare plainly* that they seek a country." This is what glorifies God. It would avail nothing if we were to be compelled, as with bit and bridle, to go from earth to Heaven; but when, through grace, we voluntarily abandon the things of earth to seek those things which are above, this is to the glory of God, because it demonstrates that what He has to give is far more attractive than this present world.*

{*"He led them forth by the right way, that *they might go* to a city of habitation" (Ps. 107: 7). Grace not only leads forth from Egypt, but imparts the capacity and the desire to go to Canaan.}

David, however, accepted Ziklag, and instead of remaining as a homeless stranger in the cave of Adullam, he becomes a citizen in the land of the Philistines. Nor does he now act the madman, as before: no; he now acts the part of a positive deceiver. He wages war on the Geshurites and Gezrites, and tells a lie about it, lest he should again lose his self-chosen place of protection. Yea, so far does he proceed in his unhappy course, that when Achish proposes to him to act as ally to the Philistines, his answer is, "Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make thee keeper of my head for ever Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek; and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds and by thousands; *but David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish.*"

Here, then, we have a strange anomaly — a king of Israel about to be made keeper of the head of a Philistine, and about to draw the sword against the armies of the living God. Was ever anything like this? The slayer of Goliath, servant to a Philistine! Who could have looked for such a thing? Truly difficult is it for us to determine where all this would have ended, had David been left to the full results of his false position. But this could not be. God was

graciously watching His poor wanderer, and had rich and manifold mercies in store for him, as well as some humbling lessons and painful exercises of soul.

The very lords of the Philistines were the instruments made use of by the Lord to deliver David from his strange position. They, judging from his past ways, could not be induced to trust him as an ally. "Is not this David, and how can we confide in him?" A Philistine could never rely upon a Hebrew for co-operation against Hebrews. In a word, the men of this world can never place full confidence in one who has once been decided for the truth of God. A saint who has got out of communion and gone back to the world, though he may go to a great length, will never be regarded or confided in as one of themselves; he will be suspected, just as David was by the Philistines. "Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us."

They could give him a certain place amongst them, but when it became a question of war between them and Israel, they would not acknowledge him. And they were wise; for let David *assume* what character he might, he could be *really* nought else save an enemy to the Philistines. He might *feign* himself to be mad; he might *pretend* to make war upon the south of Judah; but when matters came to a positive issue, David could only act consistently with his true character, as the slayer of ten thousands of Philistines. The fact is, from first to last David was misunderstood; the Philistines did not know what it was that had sent him into their midst. There was far more in the apparent madman than they could fathom. They thought that he desired to be reconciled to his master, Saul, little imagining that they had before them one who was so soon to lay his hand upon the sceptre of Israel, and to make them feel the weight of his power.

However, the Lord would not allow David to appear in the field against Israel. He sent him back, or rather He led him aside, in order that He might deal with him in secret about his course. "So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag,

and burned it with fire; and had taken the women captives that were therein. They slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way.

David is here made to feel the bitter result of his having sought to Achish for help in the day of his need. He had taken up his position amongst the uncircumcised, and must, therefore, be made a partaker of their wretchedness. Had he remained amongst the mountains of Judah, he would have escaped all this sorrow; his God would have been a wall of fire round about him. But he had fled to Ziklag to escape Saul; and then, as it were, at the very moment when Saul was falling on Mount Gilboa, David was weeping over the ruins of Ziklag. Surely it was not thus we should have expected to find David. "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep And David was greatly distressed, for the people spake of stoning him."

In all this God was dealing with His dear child, not to crush him, but to bring him to a right sense of the course he had been pursuing amongst the Philistines. Surely when David beheld the smouldering ashes of Ziklag, and felt himself deprived of his wives, children, and all, he had a practical lesson as to the evil and sorrow of taking anything from the world. We can hardly picture to ourselves a condition more painful than that in which David found himself on his return to Ziklag. He had been, for a year and four months, pursuing a course which might have left him with an uneasy conscience toward God; he was cast off by those on whose protection he had thrown himself; his place of refuge was burned; his wives and property were gone; and lastly, his companions, those who had followed him in all his wanderings, were threatening to stone him.

Thus was David sunk to the very lowest ebb, in every point of view; all creature streams were dried up; and not only so, but the enemy might effectually ply his fiery darts at such a moment — conscience might work, and memory call up the scenes of the past: his abandoning the place of dependence; his flight to Achish; his change of behaviour; his acting the madman; his telling a lie; his volunteering to fight against Israel, as the servant of the Philistines:

all these things must have augmented, in no small degree, his anguish of soul.

But David was a man of faith after all, and, notwithstanding all, *he knew the Lord*, and His "boundless stores of grace." This was his joy and comfort in this exceedingly dark moment of his career. Had he not been able to roll his heavy burden over upon infinite grace, he must have given up in utter despair. He had never before been so tested. He had met the lion and the bear in the wilderness; he had met the giant of Gath in the valley of Elah; but he had never met such an overwhelming array of circumstances before. Yet God was sufficient, and David knew this. Hence we read, "*David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*" Happy, well-founded encouragement! Happy the soul that knows it! Happy he who could rise from the very deepest depths of human misery, up to God, and His never failing resources! Faith knows God to be fully equal to all human need, human weakness, human failure, human sin. God is above all, beyond all, beneath all; and the heart that apprehends Him is lifted above all the trials and difficulties of the way.

There is no condition in which the Christian can find himself in which he may not count upon God. Is he crushed beneath the pressure of trial from external circumstances? Let him bring God's omnipotent power to bear upon these things. Is the heart oppressed by the burden of personal infirmity? — truly a heavy burden! Let him draw upon the exhaustless springs of Divine compassion and mercy. Is the soul filled with horror, by the sense of sin and guilt? Let him have recourse to the boundless grace of God, and the infinitely-precious blood of Christ. In a word, whatever be the burden, the trial, the sorrow, or the need, God is more than equal to all, and it is the province of faith to use Him. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" when everything around was dark and depressing.

May we know the true blessedness of this. To have to do with God is rest to the soul, and happiness and power. To disentangle our hearts from self and the things which surround us, and rise upward into the holy calmness of the Divine presence, imparts comfort and consolation beyond what one can utter. Satan's object is ever to hinder this. He would fain lead us to make present things the

boundary of our soul's horizon; he would seek to surround us with a thick, dark, impenetrable cloud, so that we might not recognize our Father's countenance, and our Father's hand in our circumstances.

But faith pierces the cloud, and gets upward to God; it looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen: it endures, as seeing Him who is invisible; it can say to God,

In darkest shades, if Thou appear,

My dawning is begun;

Thou art my soul's bright morning star,

And Thou my rising sun.

Truly David's return to Ziklag was a dark hour — one of his darkest; yet God appeared, and his dawning began. God appeared for his relief and restoration; He graciously removed the weight from his spirit; He burst the fetters, and let the prisoner go free. Such is the manner of God. He permits His children to taste the bitter fruit of their own ways, in order that they may return to Him, and realize they can only be truly happy in His gracious and holy presence. Ziklag may shelter for a time, but it will perish; and even while it lasts, must be purchased by the sacrifice of a good conscience toward God, and toward His people. A heavy price, surely, for a temporary relief from pressure! How much better to endure the pressure for a time!

But, blessed be our God, "all things work together for good to them that love Him." The death of the Philistine champion, and the sixteen months' sojourn in Ziklag; the cave of Adullam, and the house of Achish — all worked for David's good. The Lord makes the very failure of His children to yield them blessing, inasmuch as it leads them to seek more prayerful vigilance of spirit, and a closer walk with Him. If our stumbles teach us to lean more implicitly upon God, we shall still thank Him, however much we may have to be humbled at the remembrance of them. Humbling as David's Ziklag experience must have been to him, we may be sure he would not have been without it. It taught him more of the deep reality of

God's grace and faithfulness; it enabled him to see, that when brought down to the very bottom of human things, he could find God there in all the fullness of His grace. This was a valuable lesson, and it will be our place to learn from it also.

Are we able to lean on the Lord amid the ruin around us? Is He beyond every one and everything to our souls? Can we encourage ourselves in Him when all without and within seems directly against us? Is His name dear to us in this day of faithlessness and cold formality? Are we prepared to pursue the rest of our course through the desert in solitariness and desertion, if such should be needful? It may be, we have learnt to cease looking, in any way, to the children of this world; but are we prepared to lose the approval and confidence of our brethren? David's companions spake of stoning him; but the Lord was more to him than all; the Lord was "*his refuge*", do we know the power and comfort of this? The Lord grant that we may know it more.

Before closing of this chapter, I would call attention to the instructive scene between David and the young man who was servant to the Amalekite. I do not say that we are to regard it as a positive type; but we are certainly warranted in looking at it as a very striking illustration. An illustration of what? Let us see.

In order to appreciate the teaching of the Spirit in this Scripture (1 Sam. 30: 11-16) we must bear in mind the difference between Egypt and Amalek; the former is associated with Israel in the blessing of the latter day, "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land; whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." Amalek, on the contrary, is thus spoken of, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." An Egyptian, therefore, and an Amalekite stood in a very different relationship to Israel.

Now this young man was an Egyptian, servant to an Amalekite, and his master left him because he had fallen sick. This was the treatment he had received from his Amalekite master; he had abandoned him in the hour of his need, because he was no

longer able to be of service to him. But his very ruin and wretchedness threw him upon the sympathies of David, who refreshed him and revived his spirit. He found him faint and weak from the effects of his former service, and having restored his spirit he inquired, "Canst thou bring me down to this company?" He here puts in his claim upon the service and devotedness of one who owed him everything under God; but the young man, though fully restored, was unable to act with David until possessed of the full assurance of *life* and *liberty*. "Swear unto me by God," said he, "that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this company." He could not serve David until fully assured of deliverance from the power of his old master.

All this is very striking as an illustration of the apostle's teaching in Romans 6. The believer needs to know his entire emancipation from the dominion of his old master, the flesh, before ever he can, with confidence, apply himself to the service of Christ. We have felt the bitterness of serving the flesh; as the apostle says, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." It is impossible to walk in peace and liberty of heart until we know where death and resurrection have placed us. Until we know and believe that sin has no dominion over us, we must, of necessity, be occupied about ourselves, for we shall be constantly discovering the working of indwelling corruption, and thus be filled with apprehension of being delivered over into the hands of our former oppressor. We may be very clear as to the theory of justification by faith; we may understand what it is to rest in the accomplished work of Christ in reference to sins that are past, and yet be so troubled about indwelling sin as to be quite hindered in our service to Christ and His Church.

The gospel of the grace of God, when entered into in its divine fullness, sets the soul at rest, not only as to the past, but also the present and the future. The Lord forgives *all* our sins, not *some* of them; and not only does He forgive sins, but also delivers from the power of sin, as we read in Roman 6 — "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

This is a truly precious truth for those who are daily harassed with the seeds of evil within. Though sin *dwells*, it shall not *reign*. And how is this deliverance accomplished! By death and resurrection. "He that has died is justified from sin" (RV). What claim has sin upon a dead man? None! Well, then, God looks upon the believer as dead — dead with Christ, and risen again; and his power to deny the working of sin consists in his reckoning himself to be what God tells him he is.

Thus, as David's oath set the young man's mind at rest, and enabled him to act with him against the Amalekites, so the word of Christ banishes fear and hesitation from the heart of the believer, and enables him, through the Spirit, to act against his former master — the flesh. Grace assures us that all our interests, for time and eternity, have been most fully provided for in the death and resurrection of Christ, and gives us to see that our only business now is to live to the praise of Him who died for us, and rose again.

"Shall we continue in sin?" Could the young man in this Scripture have gone back again to his Amalekite master? Impossible. What fruit had he from his former service? Ruin and desertion. And what fruit had we? Death. The wages of sin is death. The world, the flesh, and the devil, can only lead us down to hell. Serve them how we may, death and destruction must be the end. Men may not see this; they may not wish to see it; yet it is not the less true. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement." This is the appointment.

But Christ has borne all for the believer; death and judgement have passed away, and nothing remains but for the believer to accompany, in liberty and joy of heart, the true David against his enemies. Christ has done all for us, that we might act for Him in this the time of His rejection. He has suffered for us without the gate, and now calls upon us to go forth to Him, bearing His reproach. The believer does not act in order to get life, but because he has it. He starts on his Christian career with the full assurance of pardon and acceptance in the Beloved. Perfect justification is his starting-post, and glory the goal. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified."

It is well to be exceedingly simple in our apprehension of this great truth. Some imagine that we can never know that our sins are forgiven while here. Now, if we cannot know that our sins are forgiven, we cannot know that God's Word is true, and Christ's work perfect. Will any one maintain this? If not, both rest on the same basis. The forgiveness of sins and the truth of God's Word are linked together in the precious gospel of Christ. Doubt the forgiveness of sins, and you call in question the truth of Christ's words, "*It is finished*" words uttered under the most solemn circumstances.

Yet we know how hard it is for the heart to repose with unquestioning simplicity on the truth of God, in reference to the perfect remission of sins through the blood of Christ. Our thoughts are too shallow and contracted to take in all the effulgence of divine grace. We are too full of legalism, too full of self. We vainly think that we must add something to what Christ has done, whether that something be in the shape of works, feelings, or experiences. All this must be set aside. Christ *alone* is the great foundation, the eternal rock, the tower of salvation. To add even circumcision would be to make Christ of none effect, to fall from grace, and to make ourselves debtors to keep the whole law, and thus to expose ourselves to curse and wrath. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse."

May we cling to Christ, with a deeper sense of our own vileness and His perfectness. May we wrap ourselves up, as it were, in Him, while passing on through this cold and faithless world

2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13 - Part 6 - THE RETURN OF THE ARK

We are now called to follow David from the scenes of his exile to those of his government. Saul has passed off the stage of history, having met death by the hand of the Amalekite — one of that very nation which he had disobediently spared. Solemn warning! Jonathan, too, had fallen in company with his father, Saul, on Mount Gilboa, and David had given utterance to his sublime lament over

both. David had ever carried himself towards Saul with the fullest sense of his being the Lord's anointed; nor did he manifest anything bordering upon a spirit of exultation when informed of his death; on the contrary, he wept over him, and called on others to do the same.

Neither do we find anything like unbecoming haste to ascend the throne left vacant for him; he waited upon the Lord about it. "David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. and David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron." This was real dependence. Nature would have been eager to rush into the place of honour; but David waited on the Lord, and only moved as directed of Him. It was this confidence in and dependence upon God — delighting himself in Jehovah — that forms the peculiar loveliness of David's character, "the man after God's own heart." Happy would it have been for him had he continued thus to move on in child-like dependence.

But, alas; we have to trace far more of nature in David during the period of his elevation than during the period of His rejection. A time of peace and prosperity tends to develop and bring to maturity many seeds of evil which might be nipped and blighted by the keen blast of adversity. David found the kingdom more thorny and dangerous than the wilderness.

After his accession to the throne over all Israel, David's lovely desire, to have the ark of the Lord near himself in the city of Jerusalem, is followed by a great error. His desire was most commendable; the only question was, how was it to be done? The Word of God was exceedingly plain and distinct in reference to this important matter; it pointed out a very simple and definite way of carrying the ark of the Lord of Hosts, even upon the shoulders of living men, who had been taken up and set aside for that purpose (See Num. 3 and Num. 8.)

When the Philistines sent the ark of Jehovah back to its own land and people, they knew nothing of this, and therefore devised a way of their own, which, as might be expected, was directly opposed to God's way, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are

spiritually discerned." Therefore, though the plan adopted by the Philistines was very decent and orderly, as men would say, yet it was not of God. The ministers of the house of Dagon were poorly qualified to arrange the order of the divine service. They thought a wooden cart would do as well as anything else; it might have answered for the service of Dagon, and they knew no difference. They had once trembled at the sight of the ark, but, through the unfaithfulness of Israel, it had lost its solemnity in their eyes; and though it had been most solemnly and impressively vindicated in their view by the destruction of their god, they understood not its deep significance, they knew not its wondrous contents; it was quite beyond them, and therefore they could devise nothing better than a mere lifeless ordinance for conveying it to its place.

But David ought to have known God's thoughts, and have acted upon them at the first; he should not have followed the thoughts and traditions of men in the service of God; he should have drawn his directions from the lucid lines of the book of the law. It is a terrible thing when the children of the kingdom form themselves after the model of the men of the world, and tread in their footsteps. They never can do so without serious damage to their own souls, and at the sacrifice of God's truth and testimony.

The Philistines might construct a cart to carry the ark, and nothing whatever occur to show them the error of so doing; but God would not allow David so to act. And so now; the men of this world may put forth their canons, enact their laws, and decree their ceremonies in religion; but shall the children of God come down from their high position and privileges, as those who are guided by the Holy Ghost and the blessed Word of God, and suffer themselves to be guided and influenced by such things? They may do so, but they shall assuredly suffer loss.

David was made to learn his mistake by bitter experience, for "when they came unto the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled." The weakness and inconsistency of the whole thing was here manifested. The Levites, the ministers of God, had borne the ark from Horeb to Jordan, and yet we have no record of any stumble. The shoulders of His servants was God's way; but the cart and oxen were man's way. And who

would have thought that an Israelite would have deposited the ark of the God of Israel upon a wooden cart, to be drawn by oxen? Yet such is ever the sad effect of departing from the written Word to follow human traditions. "The oxen stumbled." The arrangement was "weak and beggarly," in the judgement of the Holy Ghost; and the Lord was only making this fully manifest. The ark should never have been in such a dishonouring position; oxen should never have been the bearers of such a burden.

"And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and He smote him, because he put his hand to the ark; and there he died before God." Truly, "judgement must begin at the house of God." The Lord judged David for doing what the Philistines had done without notice. The nearer a man is to God, the more solemnly and speedily will he be judged for any evil. This need not afford any encouragement to the worldling, for, as the apostle says, "If judgement first begin at us, what shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" If God judges His people, what shall become of the poor worldling! Though the Philistines escaped the judgement of God in the matter of the cart, they had to meet it in another way. God deals with all according to His own holy principles, and the breach upon Uzza was designed to restore David to a right apprehension of the mind of God in reference to the ark of His presence.

Yet it did not seem, at first, to produce the proper effect. "David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza: wherefore the name of the place is called Perez Uzza to this day. And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" There is much deep instruction in this. David was doing a right thing in a wrong way, and when God executed judgement upon his way of acting, he despaired of doing the thing at all. This is a very common error.

We enter upon some right course of acting in a wrong way, or in a wrong spirit, which God cannot own; and then our spirit, or method of acting, is confounded with the service in which we were engaged. But we must ever distinguish between *what* men do, and *how* they do it. It was right for David to bring up the ark; it was

wrong to put it on an ox-cart. The Lord approved the former, but disapproved and judged the latter.

God will never suffer His children to persist in carrying on His work upon wrong principles. They may go on for a time with much apparent success, as "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets." This was very imposing. It would have been a difficult matter for any one to raise an objection to the course of David in this proceeding. The king and all his captains were engaged in it; and the burst of music would have drowned any objection. But, ah, how soon was all this exultation checked! "The oxen stumbled" — "Uzza put forth his hand," vainly imagining that God would suffer the ark of His presence to fall to the ground. He who had maintained the dignity of that ark, even in the dark solitude of the house of Dagon, would surely preserve it from dishonour amid the mistakes and confusion of His people. It was a solemn thing to come near the ark of God — a solemn thing to approach that which was the special symbol of the Divine presence in the midst of His congregation.

It is a solemn thing to be the bearer of the name of Jesus, and the depositories of the truth connected with His holy person. We should all feel this solemnity more deeply than we do. We are too apt to regard it as a light thing to put our hand to the ark; but it is not; and those who attempt it will suffer for their error.

But, it may be asked, has anything been entrusted to the care and keeping of the Church answering to the ark? Yes; the Person of the Son of God answers to the ark of old. His divine and human nature answers to the gold and shittim wood of the ark. The *materials* of the ark typified His *Person* as the God-man; while the *purposes* of the ark and mercy-seat typified His *work*, whether in life or in death. The ark enclosed the tables of testimony; and the Son of God could say, in connection with the body prepared of God for Him, "Thy law is within My heart." (See Psalm 40.) Again, the mercy-seat spoke of peace and pardon, of mercy rejoicing against judgement, where the poor sinner meets God in peace; as the apostle says, "He [Christ] is a mercy-seat for our sins." And again, "Whom God hath set forth to be a mercy-seat." (The word used in Rom. 3 is

precisely the same as that used in Exodus 25, viz., *hilasteerion* — propitiatory).

Thus we perceive what a marked type the ark of the covenant was of Him who magnified the law and made it honourable — even Jesus the Son of God, whose glorious person should be the special object of the saints' reverent and affectionate guardianship. And, just as Israel's moral power was ever connected with the right acknowledgment and preservation of the ark amongst them, so the Church's power will be found connected with her due maintenance of the doctrine, the great and all-important doctrine, of the Son. It is in vain that we exult in the work of our hands, and boast ourselves in our knowledge, our testimony, our assemblies, our gifts, our ministry, our anything: if we are not maintaining the honour of the Son, we are really worthless — we are merely walking in the sparks of our own kindling — sparks which shall be speedily extinguished, when the Lord is obliged, in very faithfulness, to come in and make a breach upon us. "David was displeased" at the breach. It was a grievous check to all the joy and gladness of the occasion; but it was needful. A faithful eye detected the wrong moral condition of soul which was betrayed by the wooden cart; and the breach upon Uzza was designed as a corrective; and it proved an effectual one.

"David brought not the ark of God home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite." This was David's loss; he forfeited much blessing and privilege by thus stopping short, for the ark of God could do nought but bless all who were rightly connected with it, though it was judgement to be connected with it otherwise, as in the men of Bethshemesh, and Uzza. It was a happy time for Obed-edom while the ark was in his house, for "the Lord blessed his house and all that he had." All the time that David was "*afraid*" and without the ark, Obed-edom was "*blessed*" with the ark. True, things might not just look so cheering; the blessing, instead of being diffused through the whole nation, as it would have been had all been right, was confined to the immediate circle of him who had the ark in his house. Still the blessing, though contracted, was as real and positive, as pure and truthful, as if the whole nation had been enjoying it. It could not be otherwise, inasmuch as it was the result of the presence of the ark.

God will ever be true to His own principles, and will ever make those happy who walk in obedience; and as He blessed Obed-edom during the three months that the ark was in his house, though even king David was "afraid," so will He now bless those who seek to meet in truth and simplicity, in the name of Jesus. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I." This is the great charter of our meeting. Where the presence of Christ is, there must be blessing. Weakness there may be, no doubt, and paucity, but still blessing and comfort because Jesus is there; and the more we feel our own weakness, emptiness, and nothingness, the more will His presence be prized and loved.

Christians should seek to know more of the presence of Christ in their meetings. We do not want sermons, power of eloquence, human intellect, or anything that merely comes from man; we want the presence of Jesus, without which all is cold, barren, and lifeless. But, oh the sweetness of realising the presence of the Master! Who can give expression to the preciousness known by those on whom the dew of the divine blessing falls? Blessed be God that any know it! Blessed be God that in this day, when the sad effects of human tradition are but too apparent in the Church, there is such a thing as the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where the presence of the ark, and the consequent blessing of God, can be known and enjoyed! Let us prize this more and more, while shadowy and unsatisfying forms and ceremonies prevail around us.

We shall now dwell, for a little, upon God's gracious method of restoring the soul of His servant David. The life of faith* is little more than a series of falls and restorations, errors, and correction; displaying, on the one hand, the sad weakness of man, and on the other, the grace and power of God. This is abundantly exemplified in David.

{*Not exactly the "life of faith," but the life of saints. The conflict and trials so general in the people of God, while they testify to faith within, result from the flesh which, not having been kept under judgement, reasserts itself against the Spirit in the child of God. It is of this Gal. 5: 16-25 speaks. Were the "walk in the Spirit" a constant thing with us, the lust and warrings of the flesh would be kept under — kept in the place of death, where God has assigned the

flesh. The apostle could say as to himself, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4: 10). Ed.}

There is a considerable difference in the way in which the return of the ark is recorded in Samuel and in Chronicles; in the one we have the simple statement of the facts; in the other, we have the moral training through which the soul of David passed during the time that he was afraid of God, or, in other words, during the time that he was labouring under the effects of his own mistake. In Samuel we read, "And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom, into the city of David with gladness." David learned that so far from standing aloof from the ark through fear, it was really his privilege and blessing to be near it.

In 1 Chronicles 14, we find David in conflict with the Philistines, and obtaining victory over them. "David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? and wilt Thou deliver them into my hand? And the Lord said unto him, Go up; for I will deliver them into thy hand. So they came up to Baal-perazim; and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by my hand, like the breaking forth of waters: therefore they called the name of that place Baal-perazim (i.e., a place of breaches)." There is a very great difference between "a breach" and "a place of breaches."

God had made a breach upon Israel because of their error in reference to the ark; but as to the Philistines, it was not merely a breach made upon them, they were altogether in a place of breaches; and David might have learnt what a poor example he had followed when he, like them, made the cart to carry the ark. And he did learn his mistake, for in 1 Sam. 15 we read, "And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto Him for ever." And again, addressing the chief of the fathers of the Levites, he says, "Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord

God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For *because ye did it not at the first*, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not *after the due order*."

Thus had David learned by the "breach" upon Uzza. He was brought to see that to follow in the current of man's thoughts was contrary to "the due order." None can teach like God. When David was wrong, God made a breach upon him by His own hand. He would not allow the Philistines to do this: on the contrary, He allows David to see them in a place of breaches, and enables him to smite them — to break in upon them, like the breaking forth of waters. Thus God taught, and thus David learned, what was "the due order" — thus he learned, as it were, to remove the ark from the new cart, and place it upon the shoulders of the Levites, whom the Lord had chosen to minister unto Him for ever — thus he was taught to cast aside human traditions, and follow, in simplicity, the written Word of God, in which there was not a word about a cart and oxen to carry the ark. "*None* ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites." This was very distinct. The entire mistake had risen from forgetfulness of the Word, and following the example of the uncircumcised, who had no capacity to understand the mind of God on any question, much less the solemn and important one of carrying the ark.

But in what a wonderfully gracious way did the Lord teach His servant! He taught him by victory over His enemies! Thus it is the Lord frequently leads His children into the apprehension of His mind, when they vainly seek to follow in the track of the men of this world. He shows them that they should not adopt such models. *The breach* taught David his mistake; *the place of breaches* taught him God's due order: by the former he learnt the folly of the cart and oxen; by the latter he learnt the value of the Levites, and the place which they held in the service of God. He would not allow His people to depart from His prescribed order with impunity. And the ark might have remained to the end in the house of Obed-edom, had David not learned to lay aside his own way of bringing it up, and take up God's way.

"So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark *upon their shoulders*, with the staves thereon, *as Moses*

commanded, according to the word of the Lord. "The Lord was glorified in all this, and He could therefore give real joy and gladness, strength and energy. There was no more stumbling of oxen — no more human effort to keep the ark from falling; the truth of God was dominant, and the power of God could act.

There can be no real power where truth is sacrificed. There may be the appearance of it, the assumption of it, but no reality. How can there be? God is the source of power, but He cannot associate Himself with what is at variance with His truth. Hence, although "David and all Israel played before God with all their might," there was no divine power. God's order was shut out by the human arrangement, and all ended in confusion and sorrow. How different is it in 1 Sam. 15. There is real joy — real power. "It came to pass, when *God helped the Levites* that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams. And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song, with the singers."

In a word, this was a scene with which God could consistently connect Himself. He did not help the oxen; He did not help Uzza; the oxen had not borne the ark, of old, through the waters of Jordan; neither had they borne it round the walls of Jericho. No; it was on the shoulders of the Levites that God had put it, and His order is the only happy one. It may not always commend itself to human judgement; yet it will ever have the stamp of Divine approval, and this is abundantly sufficient for every faithful heart. David was enabled to bear the sneer of contempt from Michal, the daughter of Saul, because *he was acting before the Lord*. Hear his fine reply to her reproach: "It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; *therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight.*" Precious determination! May it be ours, through grace. Base in our own eyes — happy in God. Humbled to the very dust in the sense of our own vileness — lifted up on high, in the sense of the grace and loving-kindness of our God.

The reader will remark that 1 Chronicles 16 is just the development of the spirit breathed in the above quotation. It is the hiding of self and the setting forth the character and ways of God. In short, it is a song of praise, which one has only to read to be refreshed thereby. I would only direct attention to the last verse, in which we will find the four great characteristics of the people of God fully set forth. "Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to Thy holy name, and glory in Thy praise." The Church of God is a *saved* company. Salvation is the basis of everything. We cannot answer to any of the other characteristics in this copious verse, until we know ourselves as saved by the grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the power of this salvation the Church is gathered by the energy of the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven. The true effect of the Spirit's operation will be to lead into fellowship all who submit to His leading. His order is not isolation, but blessed association and unity in the truth. But if there be ignorance as to salvation, our gathering together will not be to the glory of God, but rather for the promotion of our own spiritual interests, as it is termed. Men frequently associate on religious grounds without the assurance of being perfectly saved by the precious blood of Christ. This is not the Spirit's mode of gathering, for He gathers to Christ on the glorious ground of what He has accomplished. Confessing Christ, as the Son of the living God, is the rock on which the Church is built. It is not agreement in religious views that constitutes church-fellowship, but the possession of a common life, in union with the Head in Heaven.

Now, the more this divine unity is realized, the more will we enter into the next characteristic presented to us, viz., *separation*: "*and deliver us from the heathen.*" The Church is called out of the world, though called to witness for Christ in it. All within the Church is to be under the government of the Holy Ghost; all outside alas, is morally under the lordship of Satan, the prince of this world. This is what scripture teaches us about the Church. Hence when the apostle speaks about excommunicating an offender, he says. "deliver such an one to Satan" and again, "I have delivered such an one to Satan. Without the precincts of the church is a wide and

dreary domain, over which Satan rules, like that desolate region into which the leper was thrust from the camp of Israel

Finally, we have the Spirit of a worshipping people: "That we may give thanks to Thy holy name." This follows from all that we have been looking at. Salvation, association, separation, and worship are all connected together. The Church, breathing the atmosphere of God's salvation, is led by the Spirit into holy and happy fellowship, and thus being separated unto the Lord Jesus, without the camp, presents the fruit of her lips to God, giving thanks to His name.

2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 29 - Part 7 - DAVID'S HOUSE AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

There is nothing in which the narrowness of the human heart is so manifested as in its apprehensions of divine grace. Legalism is that to which we are most prone, because it gives self a place, and makes it something. Now this is the very thing which God will not allow. "No flesh shall glory in His presence," is a decree which can never be reversed. God must be all, fill all, and give all.

When the psalmist inquired, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" the answer is "I will *take* the cup of salvation." The way to "render" to God is to "take" yet more largely from His bounteous hand. To be a thankful, unquestioning recipient of grace glorifies God far more than all we could render unto Him.

The gospel of God's grace comes to man as a ruined, guilty, helpless being. Hence God must be a great Actor in redemption. By His counsel alone it was planned; through His mercy alone it was accomplished in "the one offering of Jesus Christ once for all"; and by the Spirit's power alone is the sinner quickened into life and believes the glorious and peace-giving tidings of salvation.

Now, this stops man's mouth altogether as to his own righteousness. It excludes boasting, for we cannot boast of what we are but the unworthy recipients. How happy should all this make us! How happy it is to be the subjects of such grace — grace which

blots out all our sins, sets the conscience at rest, and sanctifies all the affections of the heart! Blessed forever be the Fountain from which this saving grace flows to guilty sinners!

2 Samuel 7 is full of instruction as to the great principle of grace. The Lord had done much for His servant David; He had raised him from the depth of obscurity to an exceedingly high elevation, and David felt this, and was disposed to look around him and survey the precious mercies which, in rich profusion, strewed his path.

"And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." Observe, "*David sat in his house.*" He was surrounded by his own circumstances, and thought it needful to do something for God; but, again, he was in error as to his thoughts of building a house for Jehovah. The ark was within curtains, truly, because the time had not yet come for it to find a resting-place.

God had ever moved in the fullest sympathy with his people. When they were plunged in the furnace of Egyptian bondage, He was in the burning bush; when they were treading their long and dreary journey across the burning desert, His chariot travelled in company with them all the way. When they stood beneath the frowning walls of Jericho He was there as a man of war, with a drawn sword in His hand, to act for, and in sympathy with, them. Thus, at all times, God and His Israel were together. While they toiled, He toiled, and until they could rest, He would not rest. But David desired to build a house, and find a resting-place for God, while there were both "enemies and evil occurrent."

This could not be. It was contrary to the thoughts and counsels of the God of Israel. "It came to pass *that night*, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell My servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me a house for Me to dwell in? — whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle." The Lord would not allow

another sun to rise without correcting the error of His servant. He sets before him His own past actings toward Israel and toward himself; He reminds David that He had never sought a house or a rest for Himself, but had wandered up and down with His people in all their wanderings, and been afflicted in all their afflictions. "In all the places wherein I *have walked* with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me a house of cedar?"

What lovely, what soul-stirring grace breathes in these words! The blessed God came down to be a traveller with His travelling people. He would set His foot on the sand of the desert, because Israel was there He caused His glory to dwell beneath a covering of badgers' skins, because His redeemed ones were in militant circumstances. Jehovah sought not a house of cedar; it was not for that He had come down to visit His people in the hour of their affliction in Egypt; He had come down to *give*, not to *take*; to dispense and minister to His people, not to exact from them. True, when the people had put themselves under a covenant of works, at Mount Horeb, God had to test them by a ministration which was characterised by the words "*do*" and "*give*;" but had they only walked in the power of God's original covenant with Abraham, they would never have heard such words uttered in connection with the terrific thunders of Mount Sinai.

When God came down to redeem them out of the hand of Pharaoh, and out of the house of bondage; when He bore them on eagles' wings, and brought them unto Himself; when He made a way through the sea for His ransomed to pass over, and overwhelmed the hosts of Egypt in the depths; when He showered down manna from Heaven, and caused the refreshing stream to gush from the rock; when He took His place in the pillar of fire by night, and the pillar of cloud by day, to guide them through the trackless desert; when He did all these things for them, and many more, surely it was not on the ground of anything they could *give* or *do*; but simply on the ground of His own everlasting love, and the covenant of grace made with Abraham. Yes, this was the ground of His acting toward them. What *they* did was to reject His grace; trample on His laws; despise

His warnings; refuse His mercies; stone His prophets; crucify His Son; resist His Spirit! Such were their actings, from the beginning, the bitter fruits of which they are now reaping, and shall reap, until they are brought, humbly and thankfully, to bow to His covenant of grace.

By bringing all these past ways of God in review before David, the Lord taught David his mistake in seeking to build Him a house. "Shalt thou build Me a house? whereas Now, therefore, so shalt thou say to My servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great that are in the earth. Moreover, I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house."

David is here taught that his own history, like that of his people, was to be a history of grace from first to last. He is conducted, in thought, from the sheep-cote to the throne, and from the throne into the ages of the future, and sees the whole course marked by the actings of sovereign grace. Grace had taken him up; grace had set him on the throne; grace had subdued his enemies; grace was to bear him onward; grace was to build up his throne and his house to all generations. It was all grace.

David might justly feel that the Lord had done much for him: the house of cedar was a great thing for the shepherd of Bethlehem; but what was it when compared with the future? What was all that God had done, compared with what He would do? "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Thus we see, that it was not merely his own short span of forty years that was to be

characterised by such actings of grace; his house too was spoken of "for a great while to come," even forever.

To whom, think you, are we directed in all these promises made to David? Are we to regard them as fully actualised in the reign of Solomon? Surely not. Glorious as was the reign of that monarch, it by no means corresponded to the bright picture presented to David. It was, in one sense, but a passing moment, during which a bright gleam of sunshine flashed across Israel's horizon; for hardly are we conducted to the lofty pinnacle on which Solomon was elevated, when the chilling words fall on the ear, "*But Solomon loved many strange women,*" etc. Hardly has the cup of exquisite delight been raised to the lips than it is dashed to the ground, and the disappointed heart cries out, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The book of Ecclesiastes will tell us how far short the reign of Solomon came of actualising the magnificent promises made to David in this seventh chapter of 2 Samuel. In that book we trace the yearnings of a heart that felt an aching void, and was ranging through creation's wide domain in search of a satisfying object, but ranged in vain. We must, therefore, look beyond the reign of Solomon to a greater than he, even to Him of whom the Spirit in Zacharias speaks in that fine prophecy in Luke 1, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He sware to our father Abraham."

Again, in the angel's address to Mary, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." Here the heart can repose without a single check. There is no doubt, no hesitation, no interruption, no exception. We feel that we have beneath our feet a

solid rock, the Rock of Ages, and that we are not, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, constrained to lament the absence of an object capable of filling our hearts, and satisfying our desires; but rather, as some one has observed, like the bride in Canticles, to confess our entire lack of capacity to enjoy the glorious object presented to us, who is the "fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

"Of His kingdom there shall be no end." The foundations of His throne are laid in the deep recesses of eternity; the stamp of immortality is upon His sceptre, and of incorruptibility upon His crown. There shall be no Jeroboam then, to seize upon ten parts of the kingdom; it shall be one undivided whole forever, beneath the peaceful sway of Him who is "meek and lowly in heart."

Such are God's promises to the house of His servant David. Well might the astonished recipient of such mercies, when speaking of all that had been done for him, exclaim, "And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God." What was the past when compared with the future! *Grace* shone in the past, but *glory* glistened in the future. "The Lord will give grace and glory." Grace lays the foundation; glory garnishes the super-structure. This is true of all; it is true, in an eminent degree, of the Church, as we learn from the Epistle to the Ephesians.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love . . . to the praise of the glory of His *grace*, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved . . . that in the dispensation of the fullness of times . . . we should be to the praise of His glory." And again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Here we have grace and glory set forth most blessedly: grace securing, on immutable principles, the full forgiveness of sins

through the precious blood of Christ, and full acceptance in His beloved Person; glory in the distance, gilding with its immortal beams the ages to come. Thus it is that the Word of God addresses itself to two great principles in the soul of the believer, viz., faith and hope. Faith reposes upon the past; hope anticipates the future; faith leans upon God's work already accomplished; hope looks forward with earnest desire to His actings yet to be developed. This puts the Christian into a deeply interesting position; it shuts him up to God in everything. As to the past, he leans on the Cross; as to the present, he is sustained and comforted by Christ's priesthood and promises; and as to the future, he "rejoices in hope of the glory of God."

But let us inquire what was the effect produced upon David by all this burst of grace and glory on his spirit? One thing is certain, it effectually corrected his mistake in seeking, as another has said, to exchange the *sword* for the *trowel*. It made him really feel his own thorough littleness, and the greatness of God in His counsels and actings. "Then went king David in, and *sat* before the Lord, and he said, Who *am I*, O Lord God?"

It is impossible to convey, in human language, the deep experience of David's soul, as expressed in his attitude and inquiry on this occasion. First, as to his attitude, "*he sat*." This gives us the idea of the most complete repose in God, without a single intervening cloud. There is no doubt, no suspicion, no hesitancy. God, as the almighty and gracious Actor, filled his soul's vision, and hence, to have entertained a doubt would be calling in question either God's willingness or ability to do all that He had said. How could he doubt? Impossible! The record of the past furnished too many substantial arguments in proof of both the will and ability of God to admit of a doubt on the subject.

And truly blessed it is thus to realize our place before the Lord — to allow the heart to dwell upon His wondrous ways of grace — to sit in His presence in the full, unclouded sense of His pardoning love. True, it is hard to understand why it should be so — why He should set His love on creatures such as we. Yet so it is; and we have only to believe and rejoice.

But observe his inquiry, "*Who am I?*" Here we have the hiding of self. David felt that God was all, and self nothing, when he sat before the Lord. He no longer speaks of his actings, his house of cedar, his plan of building a house, etc. No; he expatiates on the actings of God, and his own little doings sink into their proper nothingness in his estimation. The Lord had said, "Shalt thou build Me a house?" And again, "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house." In other words, the Lord taught David that He should be superior in everything, and that He could not, therefore, be anticipated in building a house. This might seem an easy lesson; but all who know anything of their own proud, self-righteous hearts, know that it was far otherwise. Abraham, David, Job, Paul, and Peter experienced the difficulty of hiding self and exalting God. This is, in fact, the most difficult lesson for a man to learn; for our whole being since the fall is set upon the very opposite, viz., the exaltation of self, and the setting aside of God.

It is needless to adduce any proofs of this; Scripture and experience alike demonstrate the fact that man seeks to be somewhat; and this cannot be attempted without setting aside the claims of God. Grace, however, reverses the matter, and makes man nothing, and God everything. "Is this the manner of man?" No, indeed, it is not the manner or law of man, but it is the manner of God. Man's manner is to set himself up, to rejoice in the works of his own hands, to walk in the sparks of his own kindling; God's manner, on the contrary, is to turn man away from himself, to teach him to look upon his own righteousness as filthy rags, to loathe and abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes, and cling to Christ, as the shipwrecked mariner clings to the rock.

Thus was it with David when he sat before the Lord, and, losing sight of himself, allowed his soul to go out in holy adoration of God and His ways. This is true worship, and is the very reverse of human religiousness. The former is the acknowledgment of God by the energy of faith; the latter is the setting up of man in the spirit of legalism. No doubt, David would have appeared, to many, a more devoted man when seeking to build a house for the Lord than when sitting in His presence. In the one case, he was trying to do something; in the other, he was apparently doing nothing. Like the

two sisters at Bethany, of whom one would seem, in the judgement of nature, to have been doing all the work, and the other to have been sitting idle. How different are God's thoughts! David sitting before the Lord was in a right position, rather than seeking to build.

It must, however, be observed, that while grace leads us away from our own actings, it does not hinder real acting for God. Far otherwise. It only hinders self-importance. It does not abolish service; it only puts it in its right place. Hence, when David learnt that he was not the man, nor his the time to lay aside the sword and take up the trowel, how readily did he acquiesce! How readily did he draw forth his sword from its scabbard, and take his place once more on the field of battle! How ready was he to be the militant servant to the end, and allow the curtain to drop upon him as builder! How ready was he to retire, and allow another to do the work!

In 2 Sam. 8 we find David smiting, slaying, taking, and thus earning for himself a still more extensive fame as a man of war, and proving how effectually he had learnt the Lord's lesson. Thus will it ever be with all who have learned in the school of God. It matters little what the character of service may be, whether building the house, or subduing the foes of the Lord. The true servant is ready for anything. David came forth from amid the holy repose of the Lord's house to fight the Lord's battles, in order that he might clear the ground for another to lay the foundation of that house, which his heart had so fondly desired to build. Thus David was the servant throughout. In the sheepfold, in the valley of Elah, in the house of Saul, on the throne of Israel, he maintained the character of a servant.

But we must pass to other scenes, in order to learn other and deeper principles in reference to David's connection with the house of God. He had to learn, in a remarkable manner, where the foundation of the Lord's house was to be laid. Let the reader turn to 1 Chronicles 21 and read it. It is parallel with 2 Samuel 24, and furnishes the account of David's fall in numbering the people. He became proud of his hosts, or rather the Lord's hosts, which he would fain regard as his. He desired to count his resources, and, alas! he had to learn the emptiness thereof: the sword of the destroying angel mowed down seventy thousand of his boasted

numbers, and brought home to his conscience, in terrible solemnity, his grievous sin in attempting to number the Lord's people.

However, it had the effect of eliciting much of the sweet, self-renouncing grace that was in David. Hear his touching words, as he exposes his own bosom to the stroke of judgement: "And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on *Thy* people, that they should be plagued." This was precious grace. He learned to say, "Thy people," and was ready to stand between them and the foe.

But there was mercy in the midst of wrath. By the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, the angel of judgement sheathed his sword. "Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite." Here, then, was the place where mercy triumphed, and caused her voice to be heard above the roar of judgement. Here the blood of the victim flowed, and here the foundation of the Lord's house was laid.

At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon: but David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid, because of the sword of the angel of the Lord. Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel. And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel: and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God."

Blessed discovery! Thus impressively and solemnly, and effectually, was David taught the place where the Lord's house should be built, and its deep significance! The Lord knows how to lead His people, and to instruct them in the deep secrets of His mind. He taught His servant David by the instrumentality of judgement first, and mercy afterwards, and thus led him to the place and its meaning where He would have His temple built. It was by his

necessities he learnt about the temple to God, and he went forth to make preparation for it as one who had learnt God's character by his own deep failure.

"This is the house of the Lord God" — the place where mercy rejoiced against judgement — the place where the blood of the victim flowed — the place where David had his sin blotted out. This was very different from going to build on the ground of his dwelling in a house of cedar, as in 2 Samuel 7. Instead of saying, "Lo, I dwell in a house of cedar," he might say, "Lo, I am a poor, pardoned sinner." It is one thing to act on the ground of what *we* are; and quite another thing to act on the ground of what *God is*. The house of God must ever be the witness of His mercy, and this holds good whether we look at the temple of old or the Church now. Both show forth the triumph of mercy over judgement.

At the cross we behold the stroke of justice falling upon the spotless Victim, and then the Holy Ghost came down to gather men around the person of Him who was raised from the dead. Just as David began to gather the hewed stones, and the materials for the joinings of the house, the moment the place of the foundation was settled. The Church is the temple of the living God, of which Christ is the chief corner stone. The materials for this building were all provided, and the place of its foundation purchased, in the season of Christ's trouble; for David represents Christ in His sufferings, as Solomon represents Him in His glory. David was the man of war; Solomon, the man of rest. David had to grapple with enemies; Solomon was able to say, "There is neither enemy nor evil occurrent." Thus do these two kings shadow forth Him who, by His cross and passion, made ample provision for the building of the temple which shall be manifested in divine order and perfectness in the day of His coming glory.

David proved, in the end, that though his *thoughts* as to the time of building the house needed to be corrected, his *affection* for the house itself was not the less fervent. He says, at the close, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God, the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood: onyx-stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones

and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance" (1 Chr. 29: 2).

{In 2 Samuel 24: 24, we read, "So David bought the *threshing-floor* and the *oxen* for fifty shekels of silver." And in 1 Chr. 21: 25, we read, "So David gave to Ornan *for the place six hundred* shekels of gold by weight." In Samuel, only the "threshing-floor and the oxen" for sacrifice at the time of the plague are mentioned; while in Chronicles "the place" — the whole temple hill — seems to be comprehended.}

Thus does grace put service into its proper place, and not only so, but imparts an energy to it which ill-timed service can never exhibit. David had learnt lessons when he sat in the Lord's presence, and when he stood on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, which wonderfully fitted him for making the needed preparations for the temple. He could now say, "I have prepared with *all my might*." And again, "Because I have set *my affection* to the house of my God, I have of my own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, *over and above* all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold," etc. His strength and affection were both devoted to a work which was to be brought to maturity by another.

Grace enables a man to hide himself and make God his object. When David's eye rested on the glittering pile which his devoted heart had raised, he was able to say, "Of *Thine own* have we given Thee." "Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thy hand is power and might, and in Thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. But *who am I*, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for *all things come of Thee*, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our Fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store

that we have prepared to build Thee a house for Thy holy name, cometh of Thy hand, and is all Thine own."

"Who am I?" What a question! David was nothing, and God was all and in all. If ever he had entertained the thought that he could offer anything to God, he entertained it no longer. It was all the Lord's, and He, in His grace, had allowed them to offer it all. Man can never make God his debtor, though he is ever seeking to do so. The fiftieth psalm, the first of Isaiah, and the seventeenth of Acts, all prove that the unceasing effort of man whether Jew or Gentile, is to give something to God; but it is a vain effort. The reply to man, thus endeavouring to make God his debtor, is, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee." God must be the giver, man the receiver. "Who," says the apostle, "hath *first* given to Him?"

The Lord will graciously take from those who are taught to say, "Of Thine own have we given Thee," but eternity will declare God to be *the great first Giver*. Blessed that it should be so! Blessed for the poor, guilty, broken-hearted sinner, to recognize in God the giver of all — of life, pardon, peace, holiness, everlasting glory! Happy was it for David, as he drew near the end of his chequered career, to hide both himself and his offerings behind the rich abundance of divine grace! Happy for him to know, as he handed the plan of the temple to Solomon, his son, that it should ever be the monument of God's triumphant mercy! The house was, in due time, to rise in magnificence and splendour from its foundation; the effulgence of divine glory was yet to fill it from end to end; yet would it never be forgotten that it stood on that sacred spot where the devastating progress of judgement had been stayed by the hand of sovereign mercy, acting in connection with the blood of a spotless victim.

And in passing from the temple of Solomon to that which in the latter day shall arise in the midst of God's beloved people, how fully may we trace the development of the same heavenly principles! Still more, when we pass from the earthly to the heavenly temple, may we behold the glorious triumph of mercy over every barrier; yea, rather, the glorious harmony effected between mercy and truth, righteousness and peace. From amid the brightness of millennial glory, shall Israel below, and the Church above, look

backward to the cross as the place where justice sheathed its sword, and the Hand of mercy began to erect that superstructure which shall shine, with everlasting light and glory, to the praise and honour of God, the blessed Giver of all.

2 Samuel 11 - Part 8 - THE CONSPIRACY

We are again called to follow David into the valley of humiliation — a deep valley indeed where grievous sin and its bitter fruits are fully seen. It is really wonderful to trace the chequered path of this remarkable man. No sooner has the hand of love restored his soul, and set his feet again upon the rock, than he is plunged into the depths of corruption. We have just seen his error in reference to the house of God graciously corrected, and we are now to behold him led captive in the chains of natural desire. Such, alas, is man — a poor, halting, stumbling creature, needing at every moment the fullest exercise of divine grace and forbearance.

The history of the most obscure believer will be found to exhibit, though on a smaller scale, all the roughnesses, inequalities, and inconsistencies observable in David's course. Indeed, it is this that renders the narrative of his life and times so peculiarly, so touchingly interesting to us.

Where is the heart that has not been assailed by the power of unbelief, like David when he fled for refuge to the king of Gath? or by mistaken notions in reference to the Lord's service, like David when he sought to build a house for God, before the time? or by emotions of self-complacency and pride, like David when he sought to number the people? or by the vile lustings of nature, like David in the matter of Uriah the Hittite? If there be such a heart, it will find but little interest in tracing the ways of David. But I trust my reader has not such a heart, for wherever there is a human heart there is also the susceptibility of all that I have been enumerating, and, therefore, the grace that could meet David must be precious to every heart that knows its own plague.

The section of our history on which we are now entering is an extensive one, embracing many important principles of Christian experience and divine dealing. The facts of the case are, doubtless, familiar, but it will be profitable to look closely at them. David's sin led to Absalom's conspiracy. "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. *But David tarried still at Jerusalem*" (2 Sam. 11: 1). David, instead of being out at the head of his army, exercising himself in the hardships and fatigues of war, was quietly reposing at home. This was giving the enemy a manifest advantage over him. The moment a man absents himself from his post of duty, or retires from the place of conflict, he renders himself weak. He has taken off the harness, and will, undoubtedly, be pierced by the arrow of the enemy.

While at work for the Lord, be the work what it may, nature is kept under pressure; but when at ease, nature begins to work, and feel the action and influence of external things. We should seriously ponder this. Satan will ever find mischief for idle hearts, as well as idle hands. David was made to feel this. Had he been at Rabbah with his army, his eye would not have rested upon an object calculated to act upon the corrupt principle within; but the very act of tarrying at home afforded an opening for the enemy to come in upon him.

It is well to be ever on the watch, for we have a watchful enemy. "Be sober, be vigilant," says the apostle, "because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Satan watches his opportunity, and when he finds a soul unoccupied with his proper service, he will surely seek to involve him in evil. It is, therefore, safe and healthful to be diligently engaged in service — service flowing out of communion with God, for we are thus in an attitude of positive hostility to the enemy; but if we are not acting in hostility, he will use us as instruments for his own ends. When David failed in energy as the captain of the hosts of Israel, he became the slave of lust. Sad picture! Solemn, most solemn warning for our souls!

The believer is the subject either of the energy of the Spirit, or the energy of the flesh; if he fails in the former, the latter will most

assuredly predominate, and then he becomes an easy prey to the enemy. Thus it was with David. "At the time when kings go forth to battle" he was at rest in his house, and Satan presented a bait which proved too much for his poor heart. He fell — grievously, shamefully fell! Nor was his fall now a mere mistake. No; he fell into a deep pit of moral evil, of vile corruption, and his fall utters the solemn admonition, "*Keep under the body.*" Nature must be judged, or we shall make shipwreck.

And mark the fearful lengths to which David was carried in the commission of evil. Having sacrificed his character to indulge nature, he endeavours to make Uriah a cloak to screen him from the public eye. His reputation must be maintained at all cost. He tries kindness, but in vain; he makes the wronged and dishonoured Uriah drunk, but to no purpose; at last, he murders him by the sword of the children of Ammon. How dreadful!

Did David really think that all was over when Uriah was out of the way? Did he forget that the eyes of the Lord were resting upon him in his evil course? It would seem that his conscience was hardened on this occasion, and not susceptible of conviction as we should expect. Had it been so, he would assuredly have faltered and hesitated ere he added the sin of murder to that of adultery, he would have mourned under the sharp reproof of Uriah — only the sharper because perfectly unintentional — when he said, "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into my house?" What a rebuke to David! The Lord and His people were in the open fields, conflicting with the uncircumcised foes of Israel, but David was at home enjoying the ease and indulging the desires of nature.

Surely we may say, there was a time when David would not have been found reclining on his couch when the hosts of the Lord were warring with the enemy; there was a time when he would not have exposed a faithful servant to the assault of the enemy in order to save his own reputation. Such, however, is man — the best of men. When pride swells the heart, or lust dims the eye, who shall attempt to draw a limit to human depravity? Who shall define the fearful lengths to which even a David can go, when out of

communion? Blessed for ever be the God of all grace, who has ever proved Himself equal to all the demands of His wayward children! Who but God could deal with even one saint for a single stage of his history? When we remember His perfect estimate of the odiousness of sin, His perfect grace toward the sinner must fill the soul with adoring gratitude!

The Lord must maintain His holiness, however He may deal with the sinner; and hence, in David's case, we find Him denouncing the most solemn judgement upon his house because of his sin. Nathan is sent to him in order to lead his conscience into the immediate presence of the holiness of God. This is the proper place for conscience to find itself. When not there, it will find various expedients, subterfuges, and various cloaks. David said, when told of the success of his diabolical scheme in reference to Uriah, "Thus shalt thou say to Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another." Thus did he think to hush up the whole matter. He vainly imagined that, when Uriah was out of the way, all would be well.

But, ah, there was an Eye that could penetrate through all this covering which David's insensibility has cast over his heart and conscience. "The sword devoureth one as well as another," no doubt, and war has its vicissitudes; but this would not satisfy the holiness of God. No; the whole matter must be exposed — the dreadful meshes of evil in which Satan had entangled the feet of his victim must all be disentangled, the holiness of God's house must be maintained at all cost, His name and truth fully vindicated, and His servant scourged in the view of the whole congregation — yea, "in the sight of the sun." It might seem, in man's judgement, to be wiser to hide from public view the chastisement of one who stood so high, but such is not God's mode; He will prove to every spectator that He has no fellowship with evil, by the judgement which He executes in the midst of His people. Nothing could avail to wipe off the stain which had been cast upon the truth of God but the public judgement of the transgressor. The men of the world may go on for the present, and sin with a high hand; but those who stand in association with the name of the Lord, must keep themselves pure or else be judged.

However, David would seem to have been most wonderfully insensible in this whole transaction. Even when Nathan's touching parable had set before him the blackness of his conduct, he, though roused to indignation at the selfish conduct of the rich man, never took it to himself. "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Thus did he pronounce judgement upon himself unconsciously; he felt not his own sin as yet; perhaps he would have proceeded to find out and punish the offender, had not the prophet's word proved to be the very arrow of the Almighty to pierce his obtuse conscience. "*Thou art the man.*"

Tremendous discovery! The sin was traced to its source, and David stood as a conscience-smitten, broken-hearted sinner in the presence of God. There is no more effort to screen himself, or maintain his reputation. "*I have sinned against the Lord,*" is the acknowledgment which flows forth from his wounded spirit. His soul was subdued by the power of the truth, and Psalm 51 was his penitential utterance, as he lay prostrate in the dust, in the deep sense of his own personal vileness before the Lord. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." Here was David's well-known, oft-tried resource. He brings his heavy burden and lays it down beside the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God — the only place in which his harassed spirit could find repose. He felt his sin to be so heinous that nothing but the mercy of God could avail to blot it out. There, however, he found a "vast abyss" which could "swallow up" all his evil, and give him profound peace in the view of his own wretchedness.

Nor was it merely to be forgiven his sins that David desired; this he needed, no doubt, but he needed more; he needed to be inwardly cleansed from the defiling power of sin itself. "*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*" The apostle says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, *and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" To be cleansed from unrighteousness is more than to be forgiven our sins; and David desired the latter, as well as the former. Both are made to depend on the confession of our sins.

It is a much more difficult thing to confess our sin, than to ask for forgiveness. Really to confess before God the sin which we have committed, is a much more humbling thing than to ask for pardon in a general way. It is an easy thing to ask the Lord for pardon; but it is in vain unless we confess our sins; and then, observe, it is a matter of simple faith to know that sins are forgiven us. The word is, "*If we confess*"; David confessed his sin.

"I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." This was true conviction. There was no attempt at palliation; no laying blame on circumstances; no looking at individuals. It is simply "*I*" and "*Thee*"; I a sinner, and *Thou* the God of truth. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." The secret of true restoration consists in taking our real place, as sinners, in the light of the truth of God. This is the apostle's teaching in the third of Romans. The truth of God is there set up as the great standard by which man's condition is to be tested.

The effect of this is to bring the sinner down to the very bottom, as it were, of his moral and practical condition in the sight of God; it strips him of everything, and lays his inmost soul bare before a holiness which will not tolerate the least speck of sin in its presence. But when thus brought down into the dust of self-abasement and genuine confession, what do we find? We find God, in the solitariness and sovereignty of His grace, working out a perfect righteousness for the guilty and silenced sinner.

Here we find truth and grace presented to us in this most important section of inspiration. Truth breaks the heart, grace binds it up; that stops the mouth, this opens it; stops it, that it may no longer boast of human merit; opens it, that it may show forth the praise and honour of the God of all grace.

David travelled in spirit through the truth afterwards set forth in Romans 3. He, too, was led down into the profound depths of his nature. "Behold," he says, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Here he looks down to the very lowest

point of depression. Man's original — *shaper in sin*! What good could ever flow from such a thing? Nothing! It is irrecoverable.

And then observe the contrast: "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." God demands truth. What could David do therefore but confess what he does? for that was the truth concerning himself. What could now meet the need of such a man? Nothing but the precious blood of Christ. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In other words, David throws himself as a helpless sinner into the arms of redeeming love. Happy resting-place! God alone can purge a sinner, and make him fit for His own presence. "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice."

God must do all — purge his conscience, open his ear again to the notes of joy and gladness, open his mouth to tell transgressors of His ways of love and mercy, create a clean heart within him, restore to him the joy of His salvation, uphold him by His free Spirit, deliver him from blood-guiltiness. In short, when Nathan's words fell with divine power upon David's heart, he cast the crushing weight of his burden upon infinite grace, (exercised through the precious blood of atonement) and thus was brought humbly to rejoice in a perfect settlement of the question which his sin had raised between his conscience and God. Grace gained a glorious triumph; and David retired from the field, scarred indeed, and sorely wounded, yet with a deepened experience of what God was, and what grace had done for his soul.

Still, David's sin produced its own bitter fruits in due time. This must ever be so. Grace does not set aside that solemn word of the apostle, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Grace may pardon the individual, but the results of sin will assuredly appear, even though the sinner may enjoy the deepest and sweetest experiences of divine love and restoring grace, while actually under the rod. We shall see this abundantly exemplified in David. He was, as we know, fully, blessedly, divinely pardoned, washed, and restored; nevertheless he had to harken to the solemn denunciation, "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house; because thou hast despised Me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."

Observe, "Thou hast despised *Me*." David had sought to hide his sin from public view by putting Uriah out of the way, forgetting the all-seeing eye of Jehovah, and forgetting, too, the honour of His holy name. Had he remembered the Lord at the moment when nature was causing her voice to be heard within, he would not have fallen into the snare. The sense of God's presence is the great preservative from evil; but how often are we more influenced by the presence of our fellow-man than we are by the presence of God. "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is on my right hand, I shall not be moved." If we fail to realize God's presence as a preservative *against* evil, we shall be made to feel it as a judgement *because* of it.

"The sword shall never depart from thy house." Contrast this with the glorious promises made to David in 2 Samuel 7, and yet it is the same voice that falls on the ear in the denunciation and in the promise, though in a tone so awfully different: in the latter, grace; in the former, holiness is heard. "Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." The death of the child, however, was but the first sound of the tornado of judgement about to burst upon David's house. He might fast, pray, humble himself, and lie prostrate in the dust, but the child must die; judgement must take its course, the consuming fire burn up every particle of the material submitted to its action.

The sword of man "devours one as well as another"; but the sword of God falls on the head of the *offender*. Things must be made manifest; the stream may flow for a time under ground, but sooner or later it will break out. We may go on for years in a course of secret evil, in the cultivation of some unholy principle, in the indulgence of some unholy lust, in the gratification of some unholy temper or feeling, but the smouldering flame must ultimately break forth, and show us the real character of our actings. This is a truly solemnising reflection. We cannot hide things from God, nor cause *Him* to think that our wrong ways are all right. We may try to reason ourselves into such a thought; we may persuade our hearts by plausible arguments that such and such things are right, good, or

lawful; but "God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Yet what grace shines out in this, as in every scene of David's remarkable career. Bathsheba becomes the mother of Solomon, who occupied the throne of Israel in its most glorious period, and who also stands in that privileged line through which, according to the flesh, Christ came! This is truly divine! It is altogether worthy of God. The darkest scene in David's life becomes, under the hand of God, the means of richest blessings — divine grace is reflected on a dark background. Thus did the eater yield meat, and the strong, sweetness. We know how this principle characterises all the ways of God with His people. He judges their evil, surely, but pardons their sin, and makes their very failures the channel through which, after humiliation and self-judgement, grace flows to them. Blessed forever be the God of all grace, who pardons our sins, restores our souls, bears with our many infirmities, and finally causes us to triumph through Him that loves us!

How must David have felt ever after, as his eye rested upon his Solomon, "*the man of rest*" his Jedidiah, "*the beloved of the Lord*"! He would remember his own humiliating fall; he would remember God's adorable grace. And, is it not just thus with ourselves? What is our history day by day, but a history of falls and restorations, of ups and downs? Nothing more; and thank God for the assurance that "Grace all the work shall crown through everlasting days."

At the close of this twelfth chapter (2 Sam. 12), we find David again in conflict with the enemy — his proper place. "And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and took it.... And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln; and thus did he to all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned to Jerusalem."

And now begins the heavy tale of David's woes, the fulfilment of the prophet's denunciation, that the sword should never depart from his house. 2 Samuel 13 records two of the most diabolical acts

that ever stained a family circle. Amnon, the son of David, offers dishonour to the sister of Absalom, and Absalom murders Amnon, and then flees to Geshur, where he remains three years. David allows him to return, contrary to the positive command of the law. Even had he been but a manslayer, he should have remained in a city of refuge; but he was a murderer, and, with his murder upon him, he is received back again upon natural grounds — no confession, no judgement, no atonement.

"The king kissed Absalom." Yes, the king kissed the murderer, instead of allowing the law of the God of Israel to take its course. What then? "It came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him." This was the next step. David's inordinate tenderness only paved the way for Absalom's open rebellion. Terrible warning! Deal tenderly with evil, and it will assuredly rise to a head, and crush you in the end. On the other hand, meet evil in the name of the Lord, and your victory is sure. Sport not with the serpent, but at once crush it beneath your foot. Plain, unflinching decision is, after all, the safest and happiest path. It may be trying at first, but the end is peaceful.

But observe how Absalom works. He begins by creating a want in the hearts of the men of Israel. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgement, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? . . . See thy matters are good and right; but *there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee*. Absalom said, moreover, Oh, that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice. And it was so that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and kissed him.... So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." The enemy's way is first to create a want, to produce a blank, and then proceed to fill it up with something, or some one, of his own providing. Those whose hearts were fully satisfied with David had no room for Absalom.

This is a fine principle when applied to our hearts in reference to Christ. If we are filled with Him we have no room for aught beside. It is only when Satan succeeds in creating a want in our

hearts that he introduces something of his own. When we are able in truth to say, "The Lord is my portion," we are safe from the influence of Satan's attractive baits. The Lord keep us in the happy and holy enjoyment of Himself, that so we may be able to say with one of old, "I try to lay up all my good things in Christ, and then a little of the creature goes a great way."

However, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. He came in by flatteries, and usurped David's place in their thoughts and affections. He was a comely person, well adapted to captivate the multitude. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." But his beauty and his flattery had no effect upon *those who were near the person of David*. When the messenger came, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom," it became manifest who were for David.

"And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee.... And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appointAnd the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on *beside him*, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.... And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over; the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness."

Thus were there many hearts who loved David too well to be drawn away by the ensnaring influence of Absalom. Those who had been with David in the days of his exile were near his beloved person in this day of his deep sorrow. "And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot; and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

This is a deeply touching scene. David's grace shines out more during this conspiracy than at any period of his life. And not only

does David's grace appear in a striking point of view, but the genuine devotedness of his dear people also. When we behold a loving band of followers thronging round the weeping, the barefooted David, our hearts are far more deeply touched than when we see them thronging round his throne. We are more thoroughly convinced that his *person*, and not his office, was the centre of attraction. David had nothing to offer his followers now save fellowship in his rejection; yet was there a charm about him, to those who knew his person, that bound them to him at all times. They could weep with him, as well as conquer with him. Hear the language of a genuine lover of David: "And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." Life or death; he would be in companionship with David.

In looking through these chapters, there is nothing that so strikes us as David's beautiful subjection of spirit. When Zadok would bring the ark in his weeping train, he says, "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and His habitation; but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him."

When the insulting Benjamite, Shimei, came forth to curse and cast stones at him, and Abishai desired permission to take off his head, his answer is, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" In short, he meekly bows his head to the dispensation of God. He felt, no doubt, that he was only reaping the fruit of his sin, and he accepted it. He saw God in every circumstance, and owned Him with a subdued and reverent spirit. To him it was not Shimei, but the Lord. Abishai saw only the man, and desired to deal with him accordingly; like Peter afterwards, when he sought to defend his beloved Master from the band of murderers sent to arrest Him. Both Peter and Abishai were living upon the surface, and looking at secondary causes. The Lord Jesus was living in the most profound subjection to the Father. "The cup which My Father hath given Me,

shall I not drink it?" This gave Him power over anything. He looked beyond the instrument to God — beyond the cup to the hand which had filled it. It mattered not whether it were Judas, Herod, Caiaphas, or Pilate; He could say in all, "the cup which My *Father* hath given Me to drink."

Thus, too, was David, in his measure, lifted above subordinate agents. He looked right up to God, and with unshod feet, and covered head, he bowed before Him. "The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." This was enough.

Now, there are, perhaps, few things in which we so much fail as in apprehending the presence of God, and His dealing with our souls in every circumstance of daily life. We are constantly ensnared by looking at secondary causes; we do not realize *God in everything*. Hence Satan gets the victory over us. Were we more alive to the fact that there is not an event which happens to us, from morning to night, in which the voice of God may not be heard, the hand of God seen, with what a holy atmosphere would it surround us! Men and things would then be received as so many agents and instruments in our Father's hand; so many ingredients in our Father's cup.

Thus would our minds be solemnized, our spirits calmed, our hearts subdued. Then we shall not say with Abishai, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." Nor shall we, with Peter, draw the sword of natural excitement. How far below their respective masters were both these affectionate though mistaken men! How must the sound of Peter's sword have grated on his Master's ear, and offended His spirit! And how must Abishai's words have grieved the meek and submitting David! Could David defend himself while God was dealing with his soul in a manner so solemn and impressive? Surely not. He dare not take himself out of the hands of the Lord. He was His, for life or death — as a king or an exile. Blessed subjection!

But, as has been already remarked, the record of this conspiracy not only exhibits David's subjection to God, but also the devotedness of David's friends to his person, whether mistaken or otherwise. His mighty men are seen thronging round him on his

right hand and his left, and sharing with him the insults and execrations of Shimei. They had been with him in the hold, with him on the throne, with him in the field, and they are now with him in his humiliation.

Now Shobi and Barzillai come forth to minister to him and his men with princely liberality. In short, the thoughts of many hearts were revealed in the season of David's sorrow. It was manifest who loved David for his own sake; and, no doubt, he returned to his house and his throne with a fuller and deeper confidence in the genuine affection of those around him.

There is, however, one character introduced to our notice, upon which we must dwell for a little. I allude to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan.

Hardly had David taken his seat on the throne, when he gave utterance to those memorably gracious words, "Is there yet any that is left of *the house of Saul*, that I may show *the kindness of God* unto him?" "The house of Saul!" "The kindness of God!" What words! Saul had been his most implacable enemy; yet, being now on the throne, the brilliancy of his position, and the fullness of divine grace, enabled him to sink in oblivion the acts of the past, and to manifest, not merely the kindness of David, but the kindness of God.

Now, the kindness of God is marked by this special characteristic, exercised toward His enemies. "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," etc. Such was the kindness which David desired to show to a member of the house of Saul. "Now, when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence.... And David said unto him, Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness . . . and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look on such a dead dog as I am?" Here, then, is a lovely specimen of the kindness of God, and here, too, we are presented with the ground of Mephibosheth's devotedness to David. Though having no more claim upon him than an enemy, or a dead dog, yet is he taken up in grace, and set down at the king's table.

But Mephibosheth had a faithless servant, who, to promote his own ends, misrepresented him to the king. The opening verses of chapter 16 will furnish the reader with an account of Ziba's actings. He pretends kindness to David, and blackens the character of Mephibosheth, in order to get possession of his lands. He takes advantage of his master's weakness of body to deceive and malign him. What a picture!

The truth, however, came to light, and the wronged one was fully vindicated. On David's return, when all the trouble was over, and Absalom perished from the scene, "Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until he came again in peace."

Such is the Spirit's testimony to this faithful man. While David was away, Mephibosheth was a mourner: true picture of what the saint ought to be now, during the period of his Master's absence. Fellowship with an absent Lord imparts a tone of thorough separation to the Christian character. The question is not at all what a Christian may, or may not do. No; an affectionate heart will suggest the true course to be adopted by all those who are looking for the king's return. What a truly divine spring of action does the absence of Jesus furnish! "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Ask the spiritual man, why does he abstain from things which he might enjoy? His answer is, *Jesus is absent*. This is the highest motive.

We do not want the rules of a cold and barren formalism to regulate our ways; but we want a more fervent affection for the person of Christ, and a more lively desire for His speedy return. We, like Mephibosheth, have experienced the kindness of God — precious kindness! We have been taken up from the depths of our ruin, and set among the princes of God's people. Should we not, therefore, love our Master? should we not desire to see His face? should we not regulate our present conduct by constant reference to Him? Would that we were more like Mephibosheth. But we are all too well disposed to minister to our odious nature — too ready to walk in the unchecked enjoyment of the things of this life — its riches, its honours, its comforts, its refinements, its elegancies, and

the more so because we imagine we can do all these things without forfeiting our title to the name and privileges of Christians. Vain, detestable selfishness! Selfishness, which shall be put to the blush in the day of Christ's appearing.

Had Ziba's account of Mephibosheth been true, how could the latter have replied to David when he said, "Wherefore wentest thou not with me, Mephibosheth?" But he was able to answer, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is an angel of God; do, therefore, what is good in thine eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king; yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right, therefore, have I yet to cry any more unto the king?" Here was simple integrity of heart. Unaffected devotedness must develop itself.

The contrast between Ziba and Mephibosheth is truly striking. The former was seeking for the inheritance; the later only desired to be near the king. Hence, when David said, "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land," Mephibosheth at once proved the direction in which his thoughts and desires were flowing; "Yea," said he, "*let him take all*, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." His heart was engaged about David, not about the "matters." How could he stand on a footing with Ziba? How could he divide the land with such an one? Impossible! The king had returned; this was enough for him. To be near to him was better far than all the inheritance of the house of Saul. "Let him take *all*." Nearness to the person of the king so filled, so satisfied the heart of Mephibosheth, that he could, without any difficulty, give up all that for which Ziba had so diligently acted the deceiver and the slanderer.

Just so will it be with those who love the name and person of the Son of God. The prospect of His loved appearing will deaden their affections for the things of this world. With them it will not be a question of lawfulness or unlawfulness: such terms are far too cold for an affectionate heart. The very fact of their looking out for the morning, will, of necessity, turn their hearts away from all beside;

just as gazing intently at any special object necessarily turns one away from everything else.

If Christians realized more the power of our blessed hope, how they would walk above and apart from the world. The enemy is well aware of this, and hence he has laboured hard to reduce this hope to the level of speculative doctrine — a peculiar tenet, possessing little or no practical power to attract the heart. That section of inspiration, too, which specially unfolds the events connected with the coming of Christ, he has succeeded in involving in almost total neglect. The book of Revelation has, until very recently, been regarded as a book of such profound and inextricable mystery, that few, if any, could approach it. And even since the attention of Christians has been more particularly directed to its study, he has introduced and built up such conflicting systems — has set forward such jarring interpretations, that simple minds are well-nigh scared away from a subject which seems, in their judgement, to be inseparably connected with mysticism and confusion.

Now there is just one grand remedy for all this evil, viz., *a genuine love of the appearing of Jesus*. Those who are waiting for that will not dispute much about the mode of it. Indeed, we may set it down as a fixed principle, that in proportion as affection becomes dead, will the spirit of controversy prevail.

All this is very simply and very strikingly illustrated in the narrative of Mephibosheth. He felt that he owed everything to David; that he had been saved from ruin, and raised to dignity. Hence, when David's place was occupied by a usurper, Mephibosheth's whole appearance and manner proved that he had no sympathy with the existing state of things; he was estranged from it all, and only sighed for the return of him whose kindness had made him all he was. His interests, his destinies, his hopes, were all bound up with David, and nothing but his return could make him happy.

Oh, that it were thus with us! Would that we really entered more into our true character, as strangers and pilgrims, in the midst of a scene where Satan rules. The time is coming when our beloved King shall be brought back, amid the affectionate acclamations of His people, when the usurper shall be hurled from his throne, and

every enemy crushed beneath the footstool of our glorious Immanuel. The Absaloms, the Ahithophels, the Shimeis, shall find their proper place; and, on the other hand, all who, like Mephibosheth, have mourned the absent David, shall have all the desires of their longing hearts abundantly satisfied. "How long, O Lord?" May this be our cry, as we eagerly look for the earliest sound of His chariot wheels. The way is long, rough, and painful; the night dark and depressing; but the word is, "Be patient, brethren." "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Into the further details of Absalom's conspiracy I do not now mean to enter. He met the end his deeds merited, though a father's heart might grieve and a father's tears flow for him. Moreover, his history may justly be viewed as a type of that great prophetic character, who, as Daniel informs us, "shall obtain the kingdom by flatteries." This, however, and many other points full of interest, I shall leave the reader to deduce from the sacred text for himself, praying the Lord to make the study of His own Word refreshing and edifying, in this day of darkness and confusion. Never was there a time when Christians needed more to give themselves to the prayerful study of Scripture. Conflicting opinions and judgments, strange notions and baseless theories are abroad, and the simple mind knows not whither to turn. Blessed be God, His Word is before us in all its lucid simplicity, and in it we have the eternal fountain of truth, the immutable standard by which everything must be judged; all, therefore, that we need is a mind fully subject to its teaching. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

2 Samuel 22 - Part 9 - THE SONG AND LAST WORDS

The twenty-second chapter of 2 Samuel contains David's magnificent song, and is parallel with Psalm 18. It is the utterance of the Spirit of Christ in David, connected with His triumph over death, through the mighty energy of the power of God (Eph. 1: 19). In it, as

the inspired heading teaches us, David presents his praise to God for deliverance from the hand of all his enemies, and the hand of Saul particularly. He thankfully recounts the glorious actings of God on his behalf, yet in such language as at once leads us from David and all his conflicts, to that terrible conflict which raged around the grave of Jesus, when all the powers of darkness were ranged, in fierce array, against God. Tremendous was the scene! Never before, and never since, was such a battle fought, or such a victory gained, whether we look at the contending powers, or the consequences resulting. Heaven on the one side, and hell on the other. Such were the contending powers.

And as to the consequences resulting, who shall recount them? The glory of God and of His Christ, in the first place; the salvation of the Church; the restoration and blessing of Israel's tribes; and the full deliverance of creation's wide domain from the lordship of Satan, the curse of God, and the thralldom of corruption. Such were some of the results. Fierce, therefore, was the struggle of the great enemy of God and man at the cross and at the grave of Christ; violent were the efforts of the strong man to prevent his armour from being taken, and his house from being spoiled, but all in vain; Jesus triumphed. "When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; in my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and He did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears."

Here was apparent weakness, but real power. The apparently vanquished one became the victor. "Jesus was crucified in weakness, but He liveth by the power of God." Having shed His blood as the victim for sin, He left Himself in the hands of the Father, who, by the eternal Spirit, brought Him again from the dead. He resisted not, but suffered Himself to be trampled upon, and thus crushed the power of the enemy. Satan, by man's agency, nailed Him to the cross, laid Him in the grave, and set a seal upon Him, that He might not rise; but He came up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, "having spoiled principalities and powers." He went down into

the very heart of the enemy's dominion, only that He might make a show of him openly.

From ver. 8-20, we have the interference of Jehovah on the part of His righteous servant, set forth in language sublime and powerful beyond expression. The imagery used by the inspired Psalmist is of the most solemn and impressive character, "The earth shook and trembled; the fountains of heaven moved and shook, because He was wroth.... He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub and did fly; and He was seen upon the wings of the wind. And He made darkness pavilions round about Him, dark waters and thick clouds of the skies The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. And He sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils. He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters."

What language is here! Where shall we find anything to equal it? The wrath of the Omnipotent, the thunder of His power, the convulsion of creation's entire framework, the artillery of Heaven — all these ideas, so glowingly set forward here, outstrip all human imagination. The grave of Christ was the centre round which the battle raged in all its fierceness, for there lay the Prince of life. Satan did his utmost; he brought all the power of hell to bear, all "the power of darkness," but he could not hold his captive, because all the claims of justice had been met. The Lord Jesus triumphed over Satan, death, and hell, in strict conformity with the claims of righteousness. This is the sinner's joy, the sinner's peace. It would avail nothing to be told that God over all, blessed for ever, had vanquished Satan, a creature of His own creation. But to be told that He, as man's representative, as the sinner's substitute, as the Church's surety, gained the victory, this, when believed, gives the soul ineffable peace; and this is just what the gospel tells us — this is the message which it conveys to the sinner's ear. The apostle tells us that "He [Christ] was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." Having taken upon Himself our sins, and gone down into the grave under the weight of them, resurrection was

necessary as the divine proof of His accomplished work. The Holy Ghost, in the gospel, presents Him as risen, ascended, and seated at God's right hand in the heavens, and thus dispels from the believer's heart every doubt, every fear, every hesitation. "The Lord is risen indeed"; and His precious blood is new and living wine.

The great argument of the apostle in 1 Cor. 15 is based upon this subject. The forgiveness of sins is proved by the resurrection of Christ. "If Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your sins." And, as a consequence, if Christ be raised, ye are *not* in your sins. Hence resurrection and forgiveness stand or fall together. Recognize Christ risen, and you recognize sin forgiven. "But now," says the triumphant reasoner, "is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." This settles all. The moment you take your eye off a risen Christ, you lose the full, deep, divine, peace-giving sense of the forgiveness of sins. The richest fund of experience — the widest range of intelligence will not do as a ground of confidence. Nothing, in short, but *Jesus risen*.

From ver. 21-25, we have the ground of Jehovah's interference on behalf of His servant. These verses prove that in this entire song we have a greater than David. David could not say, "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me; and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also upright before Him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in His eyesight." How different is this language from that of Psalm 51, on which we have already dwelt. There it is, "Have mercy upon me, according to Thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies." this was suitable language for a fallen sinner, as David felt himself to be. He dare not speak of his righteousness, which was as filthy rags; and as to his recompense, he felt that the lake of fire was all that he could, in justice, claim, on the ground of what he was.

Hence, therefore, the language of our chapter is the language of Christ, who alone could use it. He, blessed be His name, could

speak of His righteousness, His uprightness, and the cleanness of His hands. And here we see the wondrous grace that shines in redemption. The righteous One took the place of the guilty. "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Here is the sinner's resting-place. Here he beholds the spotless victim nailed to the accursed tree, *for him*; here he beholds a full redemption flowing from the perfect work of the Lamb of God; here, too, he may behold Jehovah interfering on behalf of his glorious and gracious representative, and, as a consequence, on his behalf; and that, moreover, on strictly righteous grounds. What deep peace this gives to the sin-burdened heart! Deep, ineffable, divine peace!

David's song closes with a fine allusion to the glories of the latter day, which imparts to it a character of completeness and enlarged compass particularly edifying. "Strangers shall submit themselves unto me." "I will give thanks unto Thee among the heathen," etc. Thus are we conducted along a wondrous path, commencing at the cross, and ending in the kingdom. The One who lay in the grave is to sit on the throne; the hand that was pierced with the nail shall wield the sceptre; and the brow that was dishonoured with a crown of thorns shall be wreathed with a diadem of glory. And never will the top-stone be laid on the superstructure which redeeming love has begun to erect, until the crucified Jesus of Nazareth shall ascend the throne of David, and rule over the house of Jacob. Then shall the glories of redemption be truly celebrated in Heaven and on earth because the Redeemer shall be exalted and the redeemed rendered perfectly and eternally happy.

In David's last words, as in the history of other servants of God, we see how they all found in God their unfailing portion, and a sure refuge. Thus was it with him whose history we have been dwelling upon. Through his whole career, David had learned that divine grace *alone* could meet his need; and, at the close, he gives full expression to this. Whether we look at his "song," or his "last words," the great prominent subject is one and the same, viz., the sufficiency of divine grace.

However, David's last words derive point and energy from the knowledge of God's requirements, in reference to the character of a

ruler. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." This is God's standard. Nothing less will do; and where amongst the ranks of human rulers shall we find any to come up to it? We may travel down the entire catalogue of those who have occupied the thrones of this world, and not find so much as one who could answer to the great characteristics set forth in the above comprehensive verse. He "must be just," and "rule in the fear of God."

Psalm 82 furnishes us with the divine challenge of all those who have been set in places of authority. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods." What does He find? Justice and the fear of His name? Ah! no; far from it. "How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?" Such is man. "They know not, neither *will* they understand; they walk on in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are out of course." What, then, is the resource in view of such a humiliating state of things? "Arise, O God, judge the earth; for Thou shalt inherit all nations." The Lord Jesus is here presented as the one alone competent to fill the throne according to the thoughts of God, and Psalm 72 gives us a lovely sketch of what His government will be.

"He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgement." "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth." In short, the entire psalm must be read as a sample of the millennial kingdom of the Son of Man, and the reader will perceive how entirely David's last words harmonise with the spirit of it. "And He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springeth out of the earth by clear shining after rain."

Truly refreshing and soul-reviving is this! And how does the heart rejoice to turn away from the dark and dreary scene through which we are passing, to contemplate a morning without clouds. The "morning without a cloud" is not now. How could it be? How could a fallen race, a groaning world, enjoy a cloudless sky? Impossible, until the atoning efficacy of the Cross shall have been applied to all,

and the whole creation shall have entered into its full repose beneath the shadow of Immanuel's wings. Bright and happy prospect!

But it has been remarked, that no human office-bearer ever came up to the divine standard, as set forth in David's last words. David himself felt this. "My house is not so with God." Such was his humble, soul-subduing sense of what he was. We have already seen how fully, how deeply, how unaffectedly, he entered into the vast distance between what he was *personally* and the divine requirement, when he exclaimed, I was born in sin"; "*Thou* desirest truth in the inward parts." His experience was the same when he looked at himself *officially*. "My house is not so with God." Neither as a *man* nor as a *king* was he what he ought to be. And hence it was that grace was so precious to his heart. He looked into the mirror of God's perfect law, and saw therein his own deformity; he then turned round and looked at God's "covenant, ordered in *all* things and *sure*," and here he rested with unquestioning simplicity.

Though David's house was not ordered in all things, yet God's covenant was, and David could therefore say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." He had learnt to look away from himself and his house straight to God, and His everlasting covenant of grace. And, we may say, that just as his apprehension of his own personal and official nothingness was deep and real, would his sense of what grace had done for him be deep and real also. The view of what God was had humbled him; the view of what God was had lifted him up. It was his joy, as he travelled to the end of all human things, to find his resting-place in the blessed covenant of his God, in which he found embodied, and eternally secured, all his salvation and all his desire.

How blessed it is to find thus our *all* in God! not merely to use Him as one who makes up our deficiency, but our all; to use Him as one who supersedes every one and everything in our estimation. This is what we want. God must be set above all, not merely in reference to the forgiveness of sins but also in reference to our every necessity. "I am God, and there is none else. LOOK UNTO ME. Many who trust God for salvation, nevertheless, fail much in the minute details of life; and yet God is glorified in being made the depositary of all our cares, and the bearer of all our burdens. There

is nothing too small as not to be brought to Him, and nothing so small as not to be more than a match for our capacity, did we but enter into the sense of our nothingness.

But we find another element in 2 Sam. 23, an element, too, which might seem introduced rather abruptly: I allude to the record of David's mighty men. This has been already alluded to; but it is interesting to notice it in connection with God's covenant.

There were two things to cheer and comfort David's heart, viz., the faithfulness of God, and the devotedness of his servants. And, in looking at the close of Paul's course, we find that he had the same springs of comfort and encouragement. In the Second Epistle to Timothy, he glances at the condition of things around him; he sees the "great house," which assuredly was "not so with God" as He required it; he sees all that were in Asia turned away from him; he sees Hymeneus and Philetus teaching false doctrine, and overturning the faith of some; he sees Alexander the coppersmith doing much mischief; he sees many with itching ears, heaping to themselves teachers, and turning away from the truth to fables; he sees the perilous times setting in with fearful rapidity: in a word, he sees the whole fabric, humanly speaking, going to pieces.

But he, like David, rested in the assurance that "the foundation of God standeth sure," and he was also cheered by the individual devotedness of some who, like mighty men, through the grace of God were standing faithful amid the wreck. He remembered the faith of a Timothy, the love of an Onesiphorus; and, moreover, he was cheered by the fact that in darkest times there would be a company of faithful ones who would call on the Lord out of a pure heart. These latter he exhorts Timothy to follow, having purged himself from the dishonourable vessels of the great house.

Thus was it with David. He could count his worthies, and record their deeds. Though his own house was not what it ought to be, and though "the sons of Belial" were around him, yet he could speak of an Adino, a Dodo, and a Shammah, men who had hazarded their lives for him, and had signalled their names by deeds of prowess against the uncircumcised.

Thank God, He will never leave Himself without a witness; He will always have a people devoted to His cause in the world. Did we not know and believe this, at a time like the present our hearts might indeed sink within us. A few years have wrought a mighty change in the sphere of action of many Christians. Things are not as they once were amongst us, and we may with truth say, "Our house is not so with God." Many of us have, it may be, been disappointed; we looked for much, and, alas, it has come to little — oh, how little! We have found that we were just like others, or, if we differed in aught, it was in our making a higher profession, and, as a consequence, incurring higher responsibilities, and exhibiting greater inconsistencies. We thought we were somewhat, but we grievously erred, and are now learning our error. The Lord grant that we may learn it rightly, learn it thoroughly — in the dust, in His presence, that we may lift our heads proudly no more, but walk in the abiding sense of our own emptiness. The Lord's address to Laodicea must be remembered, and we may ponder it with profit. Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold, tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see.

If our past experience leads us to cling more simply to Jesus, we shall have reason to bless the Lord for it all; and, as it is, we cannot but feel it to be a special mercy to be delivered from every false ground of confidence. If we were seeking to build up a system, it is well to be delivered from its influence and to be brought to adhere simply to the Word and Spirit of God, which are the appointed companions of the Church's path through the wilderness.

Nor are we, either, void of the sweet encouragement to be derived from the devotedness of one or another here and there. There are many who are proving their affection for the person of Christ, and the high estimation in which they hold the doctrine of the Church. This is a great mercy. The enemy, though he has done much mischief, has it not all his own way. There are those who are ready to spend their strength and energy in the defence of the gospel. May

the Lord add to their number — may He also add to the vigour of their testimony; and, finally, may He make us increasingly thankful for His grace in having set before us, in His Word, the true position and path of His servants, and those principles which can alone sustain us in the midst of strife and confusion.

David had thought to do much in his day, and was sincere in the thought; but he had to learn that the will of God concerning him was that he should "serve his generation." We, too, must learn this — we must learn that a humble mind, a devoted heart, a tender conscience, an honest purpose, are far more precious in the sight of God than mere outward services, however showy and attractive. "To obey is better than sacrifice; and to harken than the fat of rams." Salutory words, these, for a day of religiousness, like the present, wherein divine principle is so loosely held.

The Lord keep us faithful to the end, so that whether like those who have gone before us, we fall asleep in Jesus, or be caught up to meet Him in the air, we "may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Meanwhile, let us rejoice in the apostle's word to his son Timothy — "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His;" and, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

1 Samuel 18: 1-4

JONATHAN

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David: and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.... Then Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow and to his girdle.”

What an exquisite picture we have here! A picture of love stripping itself to clothe its object. There is a vast difference between Saul and Jonathan in this scene. Saul took David home with him to magnify himself by keeping such an one near to himself in his house. But Jonathan stripped himself to clothe David. This was love in one of its charming activities. Jonathan, in common with the many thousands of Israel, had watched the scene in the valley of Elah. He had seen David go forth, single handed, to meet the terrible foe Goliath, whose height, demeanor and words had struck terror into the hearts of the people. He had seen that haughty giant laid low by the hand of faith. He participated with all in the splendid victory.

But there was more than this. It was not merely the victory but the *victor* who filled the heart of Jonathan — not merely the work done, but the one who had done it. Jonathan did not rest satisfied with saying, “Thank God, the giant is dead and we are delivered and may return to our homes and enjoy ourselves.” Ah! no; he felt his heart drawn and knit to the conqueror. It was not that he valued the victory less, but he valued the victor more. Therefore, he found his joy in stripping himself of his robes and his armor in order to put them upon the object of his affection.

Christian reader, there is a lesson here for us, and not only a lesson but a rebuke. How prone are we to be occupied with redemption rather than the Redeemer, with salvation rather than with the Savior! No doubt we should rejoice in our salvation, but should we rest there? Should we not, like Jonathan, seek to strip

ourselves in order to magnify the Person of Him who went down into the dust of death for us? Assuredly we should, and all the more because He does not demand anything of us. David did not ask Jonathan for his robe or his sword. Had he done so, it would have robbed the scene of all its beauty. No, it was a purely voluntary act. Jonathan forgot himself and thought only of David. Thus it should be with us and the true David. Love delights to strip itself for its object. "The love of Christ constraineth us." And again. "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3: 7-8).

Oh! for more of this spirit! May our hearts be drawn out and knit more and more to Christ in this day of hollow profession and empty religious formality! May we be so filled with the Holy Spirit that with purpose of heart we may cling to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

2 Sam. 12: 16, 2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 28: 2

DAVID'S THREE ATTITUDES

In the course of David's most eventful and deeply instructive history, we find him presented by the pen of inspiration in three remarkable attitudes — lying as a penitent; sitting as a worshiper; standing as a servant. We also hear his utterances in these attitudes. The seeing and the hearing are full of deep moral instruction for our souls. May the Holy Spirit enable us to profit by it! May He guide our thoughts as we look at and listen to King David as a penitent, a worshiper and a servant! First, we have him:

Lying as a Penitent – (2 Sam. 12: 16)

“And David fasted, and went in and lay all night upon the earth” (2 Sam. 12: 16). Here we have David lying upon the earth in the attitude of a true penitent. The arrow of conviction had entered his conscience. Nathan's pointed word, “Thou art the man,” had fallen with divine power upon his heart. He takes his place in the dust, conscience-smitten and heart-broken before God.

Such is the attitude. Let us now listen to the utterance. We find it in Psalm 51. And what an utterance! How fully in keeping with the attitude! “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.” This is real work. The penitent places his sins side by side with the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God. This was the very best thing for him to do. The best place for a convicted conscience is the presence of divine mercy. When a convicted sinner and divine love meet, there is a speedy settlement of the question of sin. It is the joy of God to pardon sin. He delights in mercy. Judgment is His strange work. He will cause us to feel the sinfulness of sin, to judge it, to hate it. He will never work with untempered mortar or cry *peace* where there is no peace. He will send the arrow home. But, blessed be His name, the arrow from *His* quiver is sure to be followed by the love of His heart. The wound which His arrow inflicts will be healed by the precious balm which

His love ever applies. This is the order: "Thou art the man," "I have sinned against the Lord," "The Lord hath put away thy sin."

Yes, beloved reader, sin must be judged in the conscience. And the more thoroughly it is judged the better. We greatly dread a superficial work of conscience — a false peace. We like to see the conscience probed to its deepest depths by the action of the Word and the Spirit of God. We want to see the grand question of sin and righteousness fully discussed and finally settled in the heart.

We have to bear in mind that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, and in this dangerous character, it is quite possible he may endeavor to lead souls into a kind of false peace and happiness not founded upon the cross as the divine provision for the sinner's deepest need. We should deeply ponder those weighty words in the parable of the sower. "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word and immediately with joy receiveth it: yet hath he no root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended" (Matt. 13: 20-21).

Mark the words, "Immediately, with joy receiveth it." There is no deep work of conscience, no moral judgment of self or of sin, and as a consequence, no depth of root, no power of endurance. This is very solemn and worthy of the most profound consideration at the present moment. We cannot too carefully ponder the connection between the expressions, "Immediately, with joy," "No root," "Withered away." There is great danger of a merely *intellectual* reception of the plan of salvation, apart from any spiritual work in the conscience. This is frequently attended with the most joyous emotions. The natural feelings are worked upon, but the truth has not penetrated the heart. There has been no furrow made by the action of the Word. Hence, when the time of trial comes, there is no power of continuance. It is found to be mere surface work which cannot stand the action of the sun's scorching rays.

Now, let not the reader suppose that we attach undue importance to conscience-work in the matter of conversion. We are fully persuaded that it is the Christ we reach and not the way we reach Him, that saves our souls. Moreover, the foundation of the

soul's peace is not a certain process or exercise of any kind, whether of the heart, the conscience or the understanding. It is the divinely-effective sacrifice of the Son of God that purges the conscience and imparts peace to the convicted soul. It is the assurance on God's authority, received by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that the momentous question of sin was settled once and forever on the cross, that liberates the soul and gives a peace which nothing can ever disturb.

All this is so plain that if anyone were to say to us, "I have peace because I have passed through such deep exercises of conscience," we would without hesitation tell him he was self-deceived. It was not an exercise of conscience that ever satisfied the claims of God; therefore it is not an exercise of conscience that can ever satisfy the earnest cravings of a convicted soul. Christ is all, and having Him we want no more.

We deem it a thorough mistake for persons to build anything on the *mode* of their conversion. It is, in point of fact, affording the enemy an advantage over them which he is sure to use in shaking their confidence. The ground of the believer's peace is not that he was converted in such and such a manner — that he felt so deeply and wept so much, or struggled so hard or prayed so fervently. All these things have their place and their value. We do not suppose that Paul ever forgot the moment between Jerusalem and Damascus, but we are sure he never built his peace upon the remarkable circumstances of his conversion. Luther could never forget his two years in the monastery, but Luther never built his peace upon the profound exercises of those years. Bunyan could never forget the despondency, but Bunyan never built his peace upon the mental anguish which he tasted therein.

No doubt, the exercises through which these three remarkable men passed, exerted a very important influence on their future course and character, both as Christians and as ministers, but the ground of their peace was not anything they had felt or passed through, but simply what Christ had done for them on the cross. Thus it must ever be; Christ is all and in all. It is not Christ and a process, but Christ alone. Let souls ever remember this and let it be well understood that, while we press upon our readers the immense

importance of a deep and thorough work of conscience, we do not want them to build upon the work *in* their conscience but upon Christ's work *on the cross*. It is the work accomplished *for* us and not the work done in us, that saves our souls. True, they are intimately connected and must not be separated, but they are thoroughly distinct and must not be confounded. We can know nothing of the work accomplished for us except by the work worked in us, but just in proportion to the depth and intensity of the work done in us, will be the clearness and fixedness of our rest in the work done for us.

But there is another point in reference to which we are anxious to avoid misunderstanding. Some might suppose that the object of our remarks on David *as a penitent* is to prove that unless we have passed through precisely the same exercises, we have no just ground for believing we are really regenerated. This would be a grave mistake. First, David had been a child of God long before that solemn moment on which we have been meditating.* Further, David found his relief, not in any exercises within, but in communications from without, not on the fact that the arrow had entered his heart in the words, "Thou art the man" and drawn forth the penitential cry, "I have sinned against the Lord." No; but upon the precious truth conveyed to him in the words, "The Lord hath put away thy sin."

{*The reader will bear in mind that, in speaking of "David's three attitudes," we do not present them in their historical order, but simply view them as illustrating three grand points in the spiritual history of God's people.}

Finally, let not a damper be cast upon souls because the earliest moments of their spiritual history were characterized, not by profound penitential exercises, but rather by the most peaceful and happy emotions. It is impossible that the "glad tidings" of salvation can do anything else but gladden the believing soul. There was great joy in Samaria when Philip preached Christ to them, and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing when he learned that Jesus had died for his sins. How could it be otherwise? How could anyone believe in the forgiveness of sins and not be made happy by the belief? Impossible. "Glad tidings of great joy" must make the poor heart glad.

“Forgiveness 'twas a joyful sound,

To us when lost and doomed to die.”

Surely it was. But does this fact interfere in the smallest degree with the value of a deep and thorough work of the Spirit of God in the conscience? By no means. A hungry man values bread, and although he will not think of feeding upon the pangs of hunger, yet the pangs of hunger make him value the bread. So it is with the soul. It is not saved by penitential exercises, but the deeper its exercises, the more solid its grasp of Christ and the more steady and vigorous its practical Christianity.

The simple fact, beloved reader, is this. We see in the present day a fearful amount of flippant, easy-going, airy Christianity, so called, which we greatly dread. We meet with many who seem to have attained a kind of false peace and frothy happiness without any real exercise of conscience or any application of the power of the cross to nature and its ways. These are stony-ground hearers. There is no root, no depth, no power, no permanency. And not only are such persons self-deceived, but the tone and aspect of their profession are, among other influences, forming the channel along which the tide of infidelity shall soon roll its poisonous and desolating waters. We believe that cold, powerless orthodoxy and flippant, formal, airy profession are, just as thoroughly as dark and degrading superstition, paving the way for that infidelity which shall yet cast its mantle over the whole civilized world.

This is a deeply solemn thought, but we dare not withhold it from our readers. We long to see a more effective testimony for Christ, a more earnest discipleship, a more thorough self-surrender and whole-hearted consecration to the name and cause of Christ. For this we sigh, for this we pray, but we certainly do not expect to find it amid the ranks of those who have never known much exercise of conscience or tasted the power of the cross of Christ.

However, we must not anticipate a line of thought which may come before us as we proceed with our subject. We shall, with God's blessing, see in David a noble illustration of personal devotedness.

Meanwhile, let us contemplate him in the second of his remarkable attitudes:

Sitting as a Worshiper - 2 Samuel 7

In the opening of 2 Samuel 7 we find David sitting in his house of cedar and surveying the many and varied mercies with which the hand of Jehovah had surrounded him. "And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart: for the Lord is with thee."

David would build a house for God. But he was not the man, nor was it the time for that. Nathan is dispatched to correct the mistake. The service was well-meant, but that was not sufficient. It must be well-timed as well as well-meant. David had shed much blood. Moreover, there were enemies and evil at hand. There were also deeper lessons of grace in which David had to be instructed. God had done much for him, but all that had been done in the past was as nothing compared with what was yet to be done in the future. If a house of cedar was a great thing, how much greater was an everlasting house and kingdom. The Lord telleth thee, that "He will make thee an house." This was reversing the matter altogether. The doings of the past were full of grace; the doings of the future would be full of glory. The hand of electing love had lifted David from the sheepfold to place him on the throne of Israel. "And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast also spoken of Thy servant's house for a great while to come." The past and the future are both brought in brilliant array before the vision of King David and he has only to bow his head and worship.

"Then went King David in and sat before the Lord, and he said, who am I, O Lord God?" Here we have David's second attitude. Instead of going out to build for the Lord, he went in and sat before the Lord. There is great moral beauty and power in this. To an unintelligent eye he might have seemed to be in a very useless attitude, but no one can ever stand as a servant who has not sat as a worshiper. We must have to do *with* the Lord before we can act *for*

the Lord. Show us a man who has really occupied the place of a worshiper and we will show you one who, when he rises to his feet, will prove an effective servant.

Be it noted, it is one thing to sit before the Lord and another thing to sit before *our* work or service or preaching or circumstances or experiences — *our* anything. How often are we tempted to sit down and gaze at or think about *our* various exploits, even though these may be ostensibly in the Lord's work? This is sure to bring weakness. Nothing can be more miserable than self-occupation. It is right enough to feel thankful if the Lord has used us in any department of work, but let us beware of keeping self before our eyes in any shape or form, directly or indirectly. Let us not be found surveying the various things in which we are engaged, the different interests we have or the varied spheres of action in which we take part. All this tends to puff up nature, while it leaves the soul barren and impoverished.

Mark the difference! “Then went king David in and sat before the Lord, and said, who am I?” “I” is sure to fall into obscurity and oblivion when we sit before the Lord. We hardly know which to admire most, the attitude or the utterance. “He sat” and he said, “Who am I.” Both are lovely, both in exquisite moral order. May we know more of their deep meaning and immense practical power! May we prove what it is to sit in the divine presence and there lose sight of self and all its belongings!

We do not attempt to enter upon an exposition of Psalm 51 which is David's utterance as a penitent, nor yet of 2 Samuel 7 which gives us his utterance as a worshiper. We merely introduce these precious Scriptures to the reader and pass on in the third place, to look at David's:

Standing As A Servant - 1 Chr. 28: 2

“Then David the king stood up upon his feet” (1 Chr. 28: 2). This completes the picture of this lovely character. We have seen him lying on the earth with the arrow of conviction piercing his conscience and the chastening rod of God held over him. We have seen him seated in the sanctuary, surveying the actings of grace in

the past and anticipating the bright beams of glory in the future. And now we see him rising into the attitude of a truehearted servant to lay himself and his resources at Jehovah's feet. All is intensely real. The penitential cry, the aspirations of the worshiper, the words of devotedness and consecration — all is deep, fervent and genuine. “I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God.” “Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of God.” What self-forgetting devotedness is here! David was not to have the honor of building the house, but what was that to one who had found his place in the sanctuary and learned to say, “Who am I?” It was all the same to David who was to build the home. It was the house of his God and that was enough. The strength of his hand, the love of his heart and the resources of his treasury were all willingly devoted to such an object.

We would like to pause here to enlarge, but we must close. May the Holy Spirit apply these things to our hearts by His mighty power. Christian reader, do you not long for more whole-hearted devotedness? Do you not sigh after a more lofty consecration of yourself and all you have to Christ and His cause in the earth? Well then, just get a little nearer to Him. Seek to be more in His presence. You have risen up from the attitude of a penitent, go now and sit and gaze and worship. Then when the proper occasion arises, you will be ready to occupy the position of an effective servant.

2 Samuel 23.

“THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM”

“And David longed and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!”

Such was the breathing of David's heart, a desire which met with a speedy and hearty response from three members of that devoted and heroic band which flocked around him in the cave of Adullam. “And the three mighty men broke through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David.” There was no command issued. No one in particular was singled out and commissioned to go. There was the simple utterance of the desire, and this it was which afforded the opportunity for genuine affection and true devotedness. Had there been a specific command given to anyone, it would merely have afforded an occasion for ready obedience, but the utterance of a desire developed that ardent attachment to the person of David which is so lovely to behold.

And mark the actings of David in this most touching scene: “Nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink of it.” It was a sacrifice too costly for any except Jehovah Himself. Hence David would not permit the sweet odor of it to be interrupted in its ascent to the throne of God.

How little did those three mighty men imagine that their act of loving devotedness would be recorded on the eternal page of inspiration, there to be read by millions. They never thought of this. Their hearts were set on David and they counted not their lives dear unto them so that they might gratify him or refresh his spirit. Had they acted to get a name or place for themselves, it would have robbed their act of all its charm and consigned it to its merited contempt and oblivion. But no; they loved David. This was the spring of their activity. They proved that he was more precious to

their hearts than life itself. They forgot all in the one absorbing object of serving David, and the odor of their sacrifice ascended to the throne of God while the record of their deed shines on the page of inspiration and shall continue to shine so long as that page endures.

Oh! how we long for something like this in reference to the true David in this the day of His rejection. We do greatly covet a more intense and self-sacrificing devotedness as the fruit of the constraining love of Christ. It is not a question of working for rewards, for a crown or for a place, though we fully believe in the doctrine of rewards. No! the very moment we make rewards our object, we are below the mark. We believe that service rendered with the eye upon the reward would be defective. But then we believe also that every jot or tittle of true service will be rewarded in the day of Christ's glory and that each servant will get his place in the record *and his place in the kingdom* according to the measure of His personal devotedness down here. This we hold to be a great practical truth and we press it as such upon the attention of the Christian reader. We must confess we long to see the standard of devotedness greatly raised among us and this can only be effected by having our hearts more entirely consecrated to Christ and His Name. O Lord, revive Thy work!

2 Samuel 23

DAVID'S LAST WORDS

There is something deeply touching and most consolatory in the last words of "The sweet Psalmist of Israel." It is good and profitable to listen to the "last words" of any saint of God or servant of Christ. It is well to hearken to the mellow words of the white-haired and experienced, to those who have reached the final stage of life's rough journey. We all know that, upon our first starting on our course, there is a degree of romance about us. We cherish large expectations from men and things. We fondly imagine that all is gold that glitters and we foolishly hope that all the promises and pretensions of the scene around will be fully realized. But alas! as we get on, we discover our mistake. Stern reality cures us of much of our youthful romance and the blasts of the desert heat carry away much of the bloom of our young days. The young believer is apt to confide in everyone who makes a profession; and this simple confidence is lovely. Would that it always met with a more worthy response. But it does not. One meets with much, even in an ordinary Christian career, to chill, to wither, to contract and repulse. Hence the weight and value of "last words," especially when we get them, not merely as the fruit of matured judgment, but as in David's case, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

"Now these be the last words of David, David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain."

Here, David sets up the divine standard of character for one called to rule over men. "He must be just"; and upon the basis of justice is erected a superstructure of cloudless light, richest blessing and abundant fruitfulness. All this will only be realized when the

Son of David, now hidden in the heavens, shall ascend the throne of his Father and stretch forth His scepter over a restored creation.

Not only does David set up the divine standard; he compares himself with it, and it is in this comparison we have the great moral and practical truth which I desire to fasten on my reader's heart. "Although," says David, "my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although He make it not to grow."

The only way to get a right view of ourselves is by looking at Christ. This is what David does in these last words. He weighs himself in a perfect balance and declares himself light. He measures himself with a perfect rule and confesses himself entirely defective. He gazes upon the perfect model and exclaims, "I am not like that." He looks back over the past and sees his failings and faults. He turns over page after page of life's sad story and his eye, enlightened by beams of light from the sanctuary, sees the blots and the blemishes. But, blessed be God, he can fall back upon "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," and in that well ordered covenant, finds "all his salvation and all his desire."

There is uncommon beauty and power in the connection between the "although" and the "yet" in the above passage. The former leaves a wide margin in which to insert the words of a convicted and chastened heart, the latter opens the floodgates to let in the full tide of divine mercy and loving kindness. "Although" puts man in the dust as a failing one; "yet" introduces God in all the fullness of His pardoning love. The former is the language of a soul that has learned itself; the latter is the breathing of a heart that had learned something about God.

Oh! beloved reader, is it not a great mercy that, when we reach the close of our history and review the past — when, as regards ourselves, we have only to say, "My house is not so with God" — we shall then fully prove the eternal stability of that grace in which we have found "all our salvation and all our desire!"

2 Samuel 23; Romans 16.

David's Companions and Paul's Friends.

How precious are those specific links which are formed by the hand of God! There is the great *general* link which connects us with all the children of God — all the members of the body of Christ; but there are *specific* links which we should ever recognize and seek to strengthen and perpetuate, in every right way.

We were lately looking, with much interest and profit, at David's mighty men in 2 Samuel 23, and Paul's friends at Rome in Romans 16. Out of the many thousands of Israel — circumcised members of the congregation, children of Abraham — there were comparatively few who distinguished themselves by personal devotedness and wholehearted consecration. Even among those few there were marked differences. There were "the thirty," "the three," and "the first three." Each gets his own specific place on the page of the book of responsible, practical life, according to what he was or what he had done. Moreover, we are told particularly what each one did and how he did it. Nothing is forgotten, but all is faithfully recorded; and no one can ever get another's place. Each does his own work, fills his own niche, and gets his own reward.

[We may observe the same thing in the case of the twelve apostles. We read much more about "Peter, James, and John" than about the other nine. And not only so, but even in the case of those three. we mark a difference. for one is specially named as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and who leaned on His breast at supper. Thus it is all through the Word. Look at Abraham and Lot; Elijah and Obadiah; the Shunammite and the Sareptan. Christian reader, let us earnestly seek a closer walk with God — deeper intimacy with the mind of Christ.]

So also in Romans 16. Nothing can be more marked or striking than the beautiful discrimination which characterises this exquisite Scripture. First of all, mark the way in which Phebe is commended to the assembly at Rome. "I commend unto you Phebe our sister." On what ground? Is it that she is "breaking bread" or "in

fellowship" at Cenchrea? No; but "she is *a servant of the assembly*"; and "she has been a *succourer of many, and of myself also*."

He presents, in touching and forcible language, the moral basis of her claim upon the hospitality and succour of the assembly. To say that a person is "breaking bread" is, alas! no guarantee of personal devotedness. It ought to be; but it is not. And hence, to expect the sympathy, succour, and confidence of the Lord's people on that ground is unwarrantable. Even the blessed apostle himself, when he asks for the prayers of the brethren, presents the moral basis of his claim. "Brethren, pray for us." On what ground? Is it because we are "breaking bread" or "in fellowship"? Nothing of the kind; but because "we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."

Then mark the notice of Priscilla and Aquila. What had they done? They had been the apostle's helpers. They had laid down their own necks for his life. And he adds: "Unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the assemblies of the Gentiles." This is uncommonly fine. They had purchased to themselves a good degree. They had worked their way into the confidence and esteem of the apostle and of all the assemblies. Thus it must be. We cannot jump, all in a moment, into people's confidence and affection. We must commend ourselves by a life of practical righteousness and personal devotedness. "Commending ourselves to *every man's conscience*, in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4: 2).

Again, look at the exquisite touch in verse 12: "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who *laboured* in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which *laboured much* in the Lord." See what lovely discrimination is here! Why does he not class all three together? The reason is plain: because two had only laboured, while the third had laboured *much*. Each one gets his and her place, according to what they were, and according to what they had done.

Nor would Tryphena and Tryphosa have had any cause of envy and jealousy against Persis, because she was characterised as "beloved" while they were not; or because the word "much" was added to her labour and withheld from theirs. Ah! no; envy and jealousy are the pernicious fruit of a miserable self-occupation; they

can find no place in a heart wholly devoted to Christ and His precious interests.

Now, I look upon 2 Samuel 23 and Romans 16 as specimen pages of the book of responsible, practical life, in which each one is written down according to what he is and according to what he has done. It is, of course, all by grace. Each one will delight to say that "by the grace of God I am what I am." Moreover, all the children of God and members of Christ, are equally "*accepted* in the beloved," all stand in one common relationship. The very feeblest member of the body of Christ is loved by God as Christ is loved. The Head and the members cannot be separated. As He is so are they. The feeblest child in the family has his own place in the Father's heart, with which no one can ever interfere (Eph. 1: 6; John 17: 26; 1 John 4: 17).

All this is blessedly true, and nothing can ever touch it. But when we turn to the grand question of practical life and personal devotedness, what endless variety! We see "the three," "the first three," and "the thirty." It is one thing to be "*accepted*," and another thing to be "*acceptable*" or agreeable. It is one thing to be a beloved child and another thing to be a devoted servant. There is the love of relationship and the love of complacency.

These things must not be confounded. And, most assuredly, it should be the earnest desire of every "accepted" child of God to be an "acceptable" servant of Christ. Oh! may it be so more and more in this day of cold indifference and self-seeking, in which so many seem to rest satisfied with the mere fact of being in fellowship, as it is called — the form of breaking bread; and so few, comparatively, are pressing after that high standard of personal devotedness which, we may rest assured, is "agreeable" to the heart of Christ.

Let us not be misunderstood. True fellowship in the Spirit — the communion of saints — is precious beyond all expression; and the breaking of bread, in truth and sincerity, in remembrance of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us, is one of the very highest and richest privileges for those whose hearts are true to Him. All this is clearly understood and fully admitted.

But, on the other hand, we must never forget the strong tendency of our poor hearts to rest in mere forms and formularies when the power is gone. It is one thing to be in nominal fellowship and go through the outward form of breaking bread, and another thing altogether to be an earnest, devoted, pronounced disciple of Christ. This latter is what we should all ardently long for; but to rest in the former is a miserable delusion, deadening the conscience, hardening the heart, and deceiving the soul.

"Bought with a price," and not my own,
No longer to myself to live,
To be for Him, for Him alone,
Who gave me all that grace could give,
Who gave Himself — for me made sin,
My guilty worthless heart to win.

"Bought with a price," I now would seek
A living sacrifice to be,
Conform'd to Him, pure, holy, meek,
Whom on the throne I now can see;
To walk like Him this desert place,
In truth and love and power and grace.

"Bought with a price," to wait for Him,
Resting beneath His gracious smile,

Which brightens hope when faith grows dim,
And cheers me through the "little while,"
Whilst waiting here His face to see,
Who comes Himself to welcome me.

G. W. F.

1 Kings 16

The Life and Times of Elijah.

Introduction

The exercise of prophetic ministry in Israel, of old, was always a proof of the nation's decline. So long as the great national institutions were maintained in their vigour, and the machinery of the Mosaic economy carried out according to its original design, there was no need of anything extraneous, and therefore the voice of a prophet was not heard; but when failure had set in — when those laws and institutions which had been enacted, and set on foot by God Himself, ceased to be carried out in their pristine spirit and power, then there was a demand for something additional, and that something was supplied by the energy of the Spirit in the prophets.

There were no materials in the whole range of Levitical rites and ceremonies for the formation or maintenance of such a ministry as that of Elijah the Tishbite; there was too much of the carnal element in them for that. The message of a prophet could only be delivered in the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore, so long as the Levitical institutions fulfilled their end, the Spirit had no need to put forth any fresh energy.

There was no need of such a minister as Elijah in the days of Solomon's glory and greatness; all was in order then — the whole machinery was in a sound condition — every wheel and every screw worked effectually in its own place — the king on the throne wielded the sceptre for the maintenance of Israel's civil interest — the priest in the temple discharged in due order his religious functions — the Levites and the singers were all at their respective posts: in a word, all moved on in such a measure of order as to render the voice of a prophet unnecessary.

However, the scene soon changed; the mighty tide of evil soon set in, and swept away the very foundations of Israel's civil and religious system: ungodly men, in process of time, ascended the throne of David, and sacrificed the interests of the people of God at

the shrine of their own vile lusts; and to such a height did wickedness rise, that at last the wicked Ahab, with his consort Jezebel, occupied that throne from which Solomon had administered the judgement of God.

Jehovah could no longer forbear; He could not allow the tide of evil to rise any higher, and He therefore sent forth from His quiver a polished shaft to pierce the conscience of Israel, if haply He might bring them back to their place of happy allegiance to Himself. This shaft was none other than Elijah the Tishbite — the bold and uncompromising witness for God who stood in the breach at a moment when every one seemed to have fled from the field of conflict, unable to stem the overwhelming torrent.

But, before we proceed to the consideration of the life and ministry of this remarkable man, it may be well just to make one observation upon the two-fold character of prophetic ministry. We shall find, in considering the ministry of the prophets, that, not only had each prophet a distinct ministry committed to him, but that, also, in one and the same prophet, there was a double purpose carried out: the Lord dealt with the conscience about present evil, while He pointed the eye of the faithful one to the future glory. The prophet, by the Holy Ghost, brought the light and truth of God to bear upon the heart and conscience — he laid open fully and faithfully the hidden chambers of evil within — he spoke plainly of the people's sad declension and departure from God, and removed the foundations of that false religious system which they were erecting around them.

But the prophet did not stop here; it would have been sad indeed had he been confined to the humiliating story of Israel's failure, and the departure of their ancient glory; he was able, through grace, to add to the solemn announcement, "O Israel, *thou* hast destroyed thyself," the consolatory assurance, "but *in Me* is thy help"; and herein we have developed to us the two elements which composed the ministry of the prophets, namely, Israel's total failure, and God's triumphant grace — the departure of the glory as connected with, and based upon, the obedience of Israel, and its final return and establishment as connected with, and based upon, the obedience and death of the Son of God.

Truly, we may say, this was ministry of a very elevated and holy character; it was a glorious commission to be told to stand amid the fragments of a crushed and ruined system, and there to point to the time — the happy time — when God would display Himself in the immortal results of His own redeeming grace, to the joy of His ransomed ones in Heaven and on earth.

Part 1 - THE PROPHET'S FIRST MESSAGE

The reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, was a dark and dreary time for the house of Israel; iniquity had risen to a fearful height; the sins of Jeroboam were little when compared with the black catalogue of Ahab's transgressions; the wicked Jezebel, the daughter of the uncircumcised king of the Zidonians, was chosen to be the partner of his heart and his throne, and this circumstance alone was enough to secure the oppression of Israel, and the entire subversion of their ancient worship. In a word, the Spirit sums up the whole matter with these words, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings 16: 33). This was saying enough for him. The whole line of kings from Jeroboam down, had done evil in the sight of the Lord; but to do more than all of them, marked a character of no ordinary degree of guilt. Yet such was Ahab — such was the man that occupied the throne of God's ancient people, when Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his course of prophetic testimony.

There is something particularly sorrowful to the spirit in contemplating a scene like that which the reign of Ahab presents. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of testimony hushed; the firmament in which many a brilliant luminary had shone from time to time, had become overcast with dark clouds; death seemed to spread itself over the whole scene, and the devil to carry every thing with a high hand, when, at length, God in His mercy to His poor oppressed and misguided people, raised up a bright and powerful witness for Himself in the person of our prophet. But then it is just at such a time that a real witness for God is likely to produce the most powerful effect, and exert the most extensive influence. It is after a long drought that a shower is likely to be felt

in all its refreshing virtue. The state of things at this time in Israel called for some mighty man of valour to come forth and act in divine energy against the tide of evil.

However, it is instructive to observe that Elijah is presented to us, in common with all his fellow-servants, in circumstances of secret training and exercise ere he appears in public. This is a feature in the history of all the servants of God, not excepting Him who was emphatically *the Servant*; all have been trained in secret with God previous to their acting in public with man; and, moreover, those who have entered most deeply into the meaning and value of the secret training will be found the most effective and permanent in their public service and testimony. That man has much cause to tremble for his destiny who has arrived at a position in public which exceeds the measure of his secret exercise of soul before God; he will assuredly come short.

If the superstructure exceed the measure of the foundation below, the building will totter or fall. If a tree shoot forth its branches into the air to a degree exceeding the depth of its roots, it will be unequal to the violence of the storm, and will come to the ground: so is it with the man who enters a place of public service; he must be *alone with God*; his spirit must be exercised in private; he must pass through the deep waters in his own experience, otherwise he will be but a theorist, and not a witness; his ear must be opened to hear, ere his tongue can be fitted to speak as the learned.

What has become of all those apparently brilliant lights which have suddenly flashed across the path of the Church of God from time to time, and as suddenly disappeared behind the cloud? Whence came they, and whither have they gone, and why have they been so evanescent? They were but sparks of human kindling; there was no depth, no power of endurance, no reality in them; hence they shone for a time, and speedily vanished away, producing no result save to increase the darkness around, or at least the sad consciousness thereof.

Every true minister of God should be able, in measure, to say with the apostle, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who

comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Cor. 1: 3-4).

1 Kings 17, gives us Elijah's first appearance in public; but the Spirit, in James, has graciously furnished us with the account of a yet earlier stage in his history, and one full of instruction to us, be our sphere of service what it may. The sacred historian introduces our prophet in a way which might seem abrupt. He presents him to us as at once boldly entering upon his sphere of labour, with this grand and solemn announcement, “Thus saith the Lord.”

But he does not tell us, in this place, anything of the prophet's previous exercise; he speaks not of how it was he came to learn how the Lord would have him to speak: of all this, though most important for us to know, the Spirit in the historian says nothing; He simply introduces him to our notice in the holy exercise of a power which he had obtained in secret with God: He shows us Elijah acting in public, and nothing more. But the apostle lets us into the secret of Elijah's prayer to *God*, before ever he came out in active service before *man*. “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5: 17).

Now, if the Holy Ghost had not informed us about this important fact, by the pen of James, we should have lacked a very powerful incentive to prayer; but Scripture is perfect — divinely perfect, lacking nothing that it ought to have, and having nothing that it ought to lack; hence it is that James tells us of Elijah's secret moments of prayer and wrestling, and shows him to us in the retirement of the mountains of Gilead, where he had, no doubt, mourned over the lamentable state of things in Israel, and also fortified his spirit for the part he was about to act.

This circumstance in the life of our prophet teaches us a truly profitable lesson. We live in a time of more than usual barrenness and spiritual dearth. The state of the Church may well remind us of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. We have not merely to cope with evils which have characterised by-gone ages, but also with the matured corruption of a time wherein the varied evils of the Gentile world

have become connected with, and covered by, the cloak of the Christian profession.

And when we turn to the state of those whose knowledge of truth and high profession might naturally encourage the expectation of more healthy and vigorous Christian action, we find alas! in many that the knowledge is but cold and uninfluential theory, and the profession but superficial, having no power over the feelings and affections of the inward man. Amongst persons of this class it will also be found that the truth of God possesses little or no interest, or attractive power; they know so much in the intellect that nothing can be presented to them with which they are not already acquainted: hence the lifelessness with which they harken to every statement of truth.

In such a condition of things, what is the resource of the faithful one? To what should he betake himself? Prayer; patient, persevering prayer; secret communion with God; deep and real exercise of soul in His presence, where alone we can arrive at a true estimate of ourselves, and things around us: and not only so, but also obtain spiritual power to act for God amongst our brethren, or toward the world without.

“Elias was a man of like passions with us;” and he found himself in the midst of dark apostasy, and wide-spread alienation of heart from God. He beheld the faithful failing from amongst the children of men; he saw the tide of evil rising around him, and the light of truth fast fading away: the altar of Baal had displaced the altar of Jehovah, and the cries of the priests of Baal had drowned the sacred songs of the Levites; in a word, the whole thing was one vast mass of ruin before his view. He felt it; he wept over it; he did more — “*he prayed earnestly.*”

Here was the resource — the sure unfailing resource of the grieved prophet; he retreated into the presence of God; he poured out his spirit there, and wept over the ruin and sorrow of his beloved people; he was really engaged about the sad condition of things around him, and therefore prayed about it — prayed as he ought, not coldly, formally, or occasionally, but “*earnestly,*” and perseveringly.

This is a blessed example for us. Never was there a time when fervent prayer was so much needed in the Church of God as at this moment. The devil seems to be exerting all his malignant power to crush the spirits and hinder the activities of the people of God; with some, he makes use of their public engagements; with others, their domestic trials; and with others, personal sorrow and conflict; in a word, "There are many adversaries," and nothing but the mighty power of God can enable us to cope with them and come off victorious.

But Elijah was not merely called to pass unscathed, as an individual, through the evil; he was called to exert an influence upon others: he was called to act for God in a degenerate age; he had to make an effort to bring his nation back to the God of their fathers; how much more, therefore, did he need to seek the Lord in private; to gather up spiritual strength in the presence of God, whereby alone he could not only escape himself, but be made an instrument of blessing to others also. Elijah felt all this, and therefore "he prayed earnestly that it might not rain."

Thus it was he brought God into the scene, nor did he fail of his object. "It rained not." God will never refuse to act when faith addresses Him on the ground of His own glory, and we know it was simply upon this ground that the prophet addressed Him. It could afford him no pleasure to see the land turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, or his brethren wasted by famine and all its attendant horrors. No; it was simply to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers — to bring the nation back to its early faith — to eradicate those principles of error which had taken fast hold of the minds of the people: for such ends as these did our prophet pray earnestly that it might not rain, and God darkened and heard, because the prayer was the offspring of His Spirit in the soul of His dear servant.

Truly we may say, *it is good to wait upon God*: it not only leads to happy results as seen in God's answer to it, but there is also much sweetness and comfort in the exercise itself. How truly happy it is for the tried and tempted believer to find himself along with God! how blessed to allow his spirit to flow out, and his affections to ascend to Him who alone is able to lift him above the depressing

power of present things into the calmness and light of His own most blessed presence! May we all be found, then, waiting more upon God — making the very difficulties of our day an occasion for drawing near to the mercy-seat, and then we shall not only exert a salutary influence in our respective spheres, but our own heart will be comforted and encouraged by private waiting upon our Father, for the promise has never yet failed, “They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength!” Precious promise! May we make full proof of it!

Thus, Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his path of service; he came forth armed from the sanctuary of God with divine power to deal with, and act upon, his fellow-men. There is much power in the words, “as the Lord God of Israel liveth *before whom I stand*”; they bring before us in a very special way the basis on which the soul of this eminent servant of God was resting, as also the principle which sustained him in his course of service. He stood before “*the Lord God of Israel*,” and so standing, he could speak with a measure of power and authority.

But how very little did Ahab know of the secret exercises of Elijah's soul, ere he had thus come forth to speak to his conscience! He knew not that Elijah had been on his knees in secret before he presented himself in public. He knew nothing of all this, but Elijah did, and hence he could boldly confront the very head of the evil; he could speak to king Ahab himself, and announce to him the judgements of an offended God. In this, our prophet may be viewed as a fine model for all who are called upon to speak in the name of the Lord.

All who are so called should feel themselves, in virtue of their divine commission, entirely lifted above the influence of human opinion. How often does it happen that men who can speak with a measure of power and liberty in the presence of some, are before others cramped, and, it may be, altogether hindered! This we know would not be the case did they but realize with distinctness, not only that they had received their commission from on high, but also that they executed it in the presence of *the living God*. The messenger of the Lord should never be affected by those to whom he delivers his message; he should be above them, while at the same time he takes

the humble place of a servant. His language should be, "But with me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgement" (*anthropines hemeras*).

This was pre-eminently the case with our blessed Master. How little was He affected by the thoughts or judgements of those to whom He spoke! They might thwart, oppose, and reject, but that never led Him for a moment to lose sight of the fact that He was sent of God. He carried with Him, throughout His entire course, the holy, soul-sustaining assurance expressed in the synagogue of Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor," etc. (Luke 4: 18). Here was the basis of His ministry as Son of man. It was "in the power of the Spirit," and hence He ever felt Himself to be the minister of God, and as such raised quite above the influence of those with whom He had to do. "My doctrine is not Mine," said He, "but His that sent Me." He could truly say, "The Lord God of Israel, *before whom I stand*:" He was ever "the Lord's messenger," speaking "in the Lord's message unto the people" (Hag. 1: 13).

And should not all who fill the place of servants or messengers of the Lord, seek to know more of this holy elevation of mind above men and circumstances? Should they not aim at being less under the power of human thoughts and feelings? What have we to do with the thoughts of men about us? Nothing. Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether they will accept, or whether they will reject; whether we shall be highly esteemed for our work's sake, or made of no reputation — still let it be our aim, our constant aim, to "approve ourselves as the ministers of God."

But observe further, the power and authority with which our prophet speaks, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word." He felt such perfect assurance in the fact that he was standing in the Lord's presence, and speaking the Lord's words, yea, that he was thoroughly identified with Him, that he could say, "according to my word."

Such was the privilege of the Lord's messenger, when delivering the Lord's message. Such are the wondrous results of secret prayer. "Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he

prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” May it prove a powerful incentive to all those who desire to act for God in this day of weakness! We want to be more in the presence of God, in the real sense of our need; if we felt our need more, we should have more of *the spirit of prayer*. And it is the spirit of prayer we want — that spirit which puts God in His own proper place of *giver*, and us into our proper place of *receivers*.

But how often are we deceived by the mere form of prayer — with the formal utterance of words which have no reality in them! There are many who make a kind of god of prayer — many who let their very prayers get between their souls and the God of prayer. This is a great snare. We should always take care that our prayers are the natural outflow of the Spirit within us, and not of the mere superstitious performance of what we think ought to be done.

[I would offer a few words here on the subject of united prayer among Christians, an exercise which seems so sadly neglected by us at a time when it is so specially needed. It will be generally found that collective life and energy. service and testimony, will be in proportion to the measure of collective waiting upon God. Where there are not public prayer-meetings. there is sure to be a lack of service and testimony; the interests of the Church of God are not realized, and, as a consequence. the things of earth occupy a place of undue prominence in the minds of Christians. If *we felt* our collective weakness, there would be a collective utterance of that weakness, and, moreover, a renewal of our collective strength. Now I think it will be found that all important movements among the people of God have been the result of united heartfelt prayer. And surely we may say it is natural that it should be so. We are not to expect that God will pour forth His reviving grace on those who rest satisfied with their deadness and coldness. The word is, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” If we will not open our mouths, how can they be filled? If we are satisfied with what we have, how can we expect to get more? Let it be, therefore, the aim of the Christian reader to stir up his fellow-Christians around him to seek the Lord in united prayer, and, he may be assured of it, the happy results evils speedily be seen.]

Part 2 - THE PROPHET IN RETIREMENT

Hardly had our prophet delivered his testimony when he was again called away from public observation into retirement and solitude. “And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and *hide thyself* by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.”

These words are full of deep instruction. Elijah had taken a very prominent place in the presence of Israel, and though his having done so was the result of previous retirement and exercise of soul in the presence of God, yet did the faithful One for whom he was acting see it needful to have him away again into privacy, that so he might not only occupy a high place in the presence of his brethren, but also a low place in the presence of God. All this is full of teaching for us. We must be kept low. Flesh must be crushed. Our time of *training in secret*, must far exceed our time of *acting in public*. Elijah stood, as it were, for a brief moment, in public testimony, and that too, after having been alone with God, and he must at once be led away into seclusion for three years and a half.

Oh! how little can man be trusted — how badly can we bear to be set in a place of honour! How soon we forget ourselves and God! We shall see presently, how much our honoured prophet needed to be thus kept in retirement. The Lord knew his temperament and tendencies, and dealt with him accordingly. It is truly humiliating to think how little we can be trusted in the way of public testimony for Christ; we are so full of self; we vainly imagine that *we* are something, and that God will do much by us hence it is that we need, like our prophet, to be told to “hide ourselves,” to get away from public view, that we may learn, in the holy calmness of our Father's presence, our own proper nothingness.

And the spiritual mind can at once see the importance of all this. It would never do to be always before the eye of man; no creature could stand it: the Son of God Himself constantly sought the solitary place, apart from the din and bustle of the city, where He might enjoy a quiet retreat for prayer, and of secret communion with God. “Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.” “Rising up a great

while before day, He departed into a solitary place and there prayed.”

But it was not because He needed to hide Himself, for His entire path on earth was, blessed be His name, a hiding of self. The spirit of His ministry is brought out in these words, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me.” Would that all the Lord's servants knew more of this! We all want to hide self more — much more than we do.

The devil acts so on our poor silly hearts; our thoughts so revolve round ourselves; yea, we so often make our very service, and the truth of God, a pedestal on which to show forth our own glory. No marvel, therefore, that we are not much used: how could the Lord make use of agents who will not give Him the glory? How can the Lord use Israel, when Israel is ever prone to vaunt himself? Let us then pray to be made more truly humble, more self-abased, more willing to be looked upon as “a dead dog, or a flea,” or “the off-scouring of all things,” or nothing at all, for the name of our gracious Master.

In His lonely retreat by the brook Cherith, Elijah was called to sojourn many days; not, however, without a precious promise from the Lord God of Israel in reference to his needed provision, for he went accompanied by the gracious assurance, “*I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.*” The Lord would take care of His dear servant while hidden from public view, and minister to his necessities, even though it should be by the instrumentality of ravens. What a strange provision! What a continual exercise of faith was there involved in being called to look out for the daily visits of birds that would naturally desire to devour the prophet's meal! But was it upon the ravens that Elijah lived? Surely not. His soul reposed in the precious words, “*I have commanded.*” It was God, and not the ravens, for him. He had the God of Israel with him in his hiding place — he lived by faith. And how truly blessed for the spirit thus to cling, in unaffected simplicity, to the promise of God!

How happy to be lifted above the power of circumstances, in the apprehension of God's presence and care! Elijah was hiding himself from man, while God was showing Himself to Elijah. This

will ever be so. Let us only set self aside, and we may be assured that God will reveal Himself in power to our souls. If Elijah had persisted in occupying a prominent and a public place, he would have been left unprovided for. *He must be hidden*, for the streams of divine provision and refreshment only flowed for him in the place of retirement and self-abasement. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there*." If the prophet were anywhere else but "*there*" he would have gotten nothing at all from God.

What teaching for us in all this! Why are our souls so lean and barren? Why do we so little drink of the streams of divinely provided refreshment? Because we are not hiding self sufficiently. We cannot expect that God will strengthen and refresh us for the purpose of earthly display. He will strengthen us for Himself. If we could but realize more that we are "not our own," we should enjoy more spiritual power.

But there is also much meaning in the little word "*there*." Elijah should be "*there*" and nowhere else, in order to enjoy God's supplies; and just so is it with the believer now; he must know where God would have him to be, and there abide. We have no right to choose our place, for the Lord "orders the bounds of our habitation," and happy for us is it to know this, and submit to His wise and gracious ordering. It was at the brook Cherith, and there alone, that the ravens were commanded to convey bread and flesh to the prophet; he might wish to sojourn elsewhere, but, if he had done so he should have provided for himself: how much happier to allow God to provide for him! So Elijah felt, and therefore he went to Cherith, for the Lord had "commanded the ravens to feed him *there*." The divinely appointed provision is alone to be had in the divinely appointed place.

Thus was Elijah conveyed from solitude to solitude. He had come from the mountains of Gilead, with a message from the Lord God of Israel to Israel's king, and having delivered that message, he was again conducted, by the hand of God, into unbroken solitude, there to have his spirit exercised, and his strength renewed in the presence of God.

And who would be without those sweet and holy lessons learnt in secret? Who would lack the training of a Father's hand? Who would not long to be led away from beneath the eye of man, and above the influence of things earthly and natural, into the pure light of the Divine Presence, where self and all around are viewed and estimated according to the judgement of the sanctuary? In a word, who would not desire to be alone with God? — alone, not as a merely sentimental expression, but really, practically, and experimentally alone; alone like Moses at the mount of God; alone, like Aaron in the holiest of all; alone, like our prophet at the brook Cherith; alone, like John in the island of Patmos; and above all, alone, like Jesus on the mount.

And here, let us inquire what it is to be alone with God. It is to have self and the world set aside; to have the spirit impressed with thoughts of God and His perfections and excellencies; to allow all His goodness to pass before us; to see Him as the great Actor *for* us, and *in us*; to get above flesh and its reasonings, earth and its ways, Satan and his accusations; and, above all, to feel that we have been introduced into this holy solitude, simply and exclusively through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are some of the results of our being alone with God. But, in truth, it is a term which one can hardly explain to another, for each spiritually-minded saint will have his own feelings on the subject, and will best understand what it means in his own case. This, at least, we may well crave, to be truly found in the secret of our Father's presence; to be done with the weariness and wretchedness of endeavouring to maintain *our character*, and to know the joy, the liberty, the peace, and unaffected simplicity of the sanctuary, where God in all His varied attributes and perfections rises before our souls and fills us with bliss ineffable.

To find my place within the veil,

To know that God is mine

Are springs of joy that will not fail,

Unspeakable, divine.

But, though Elijah was thus happily alone by the brook Cherith, he was not exempt from the deep exercise of soul consequent upon a life of faith. The ravens, it is true, in obedience to the divine command, paid him their daily visits, and Cherith flowed on in its tranquil and uninterrupted course, so that the prophet's bread was given him, and his water was sure, and thus, as far as he was personally concerned, he might forget that the rod of judgement was stretched out over the land.

But faith must be put to the test. The man of faith cannot be allowed to settle on his lees; he must be emptied from vessel to vessel; the child of God must pass from form to form in the school of Christ, and having mastered, through grace, the difficulties of one, he must be called to grapple with those of another. It was, therefore, needful that the soul of the prophet should be tried in order that it might be seen whether he was depending upon Cherith, or upon the Lord God of Israel; hence, "it came to pass, after awhile, that *the brook dried up.*"

We are ever in danger, through the infirmity of our flesh, of having our faith propped up by circumstances, and when these are favourable, we think our faith is strong, and *vice versa*. But faith never looks at circumstances; it looks straight to God — it has to do exclusively with Him and His promises. Thus it was with Elijah; it mattered little to him whether Cherith continued to flow or not; he could say:

In vain the creature streams are dry,

I have a fountain still.

God was his fountain, his unfailling exhaustless fountain. The brook might yield to the influence of the prevailing drought, but no drought could affect God, and the prophet knew this; he knew that the Word of the Lord was as certain a portion, and as sure a basis in the drying up of Cherith, as it had been during the time of his sojourn upon its banks; and so it was, for "the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold I *have commanded* a widow woman there to sustain thee."

Elijah's faith must still rest upon the same immutable basis. "I have commanded." How truly blessed is this! Circumstances change; human things fail; creature streams are dried up, but God and His Word are the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Nor does the prophet seem to have been the least disturbed by this fresh order from on high. No; for, like Israel of old, he had learned to pitch and strike his tent according to the movement of Jehovah's cloud. The camp, of old, was called to watch attentively the wheels of that heavenly chariot which rolled onward toward the land of rest, and here and there halted in the wilderness to find them out a resting-place; and just so was it with Elijah; he would take up his solitary post by the banks of Cherith, or tread his weary way to Zarephath of Zidon in undeviating obedience to "the word of the Lord."

Israel of old were not allowed to have any plans of their own; Jehovah planned and arranged everything for them. He told them when and where they were to move and halt; at various intervals He signified His sovereign pleasure to them by the movement of the cloud above their heads. "Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed" (Num. 9: 22-23).

Such was the happy condition of the Lord's redeemed, while passing from Egypt to Canaan. They never could have *their own way*, as regards their movements. If an Israelite had refused to move when the cloud moved, or to halt when it halted, *he would* have been left to starve in the wilderness. The rock and the manna followed them while they followed Jehovah; in other words, food and refreshment were alone to be found in the path of simple obedience. Just so was it with Elijah; he was not permitted to have a will of his own; he could not fix the time of his sojourn at Cherith, nor the time for his removal to Zarephath; "the word of the Lord" settled all for him, and when he obeyed it he found sustenance.

What a lesson for the Christian in all this! The path of obedience is alone the path of happiness. If we were more successful in doing violence to self, our spiritual condition would be far more

vigorous and healthy than it is. Nothing so ministers to health and vigour of soul as undeviating obedience; there is strength gained by the very effort to obey. This is true in the case of all, but specially so as regards those who stand in the capacity of ministers of the Lord. Such must walk in obedience if they would be used in ministry.

How could Elijah have said, as he afterwards did, upon mount Carmel, "If the Lord be God, *follow Him*," "if his own private path had exhibited a wilful and rebellious spirit? Impossible. The path of a servant must be the path of obedience, otherwise he ceases to be a servant. The word *servant* is as inseparably linked with *obedience*, as is *work* with *workman*. "A servant," as another has observed, "must move when the bell rings."

Would that we were all more alive to the sound of our Master's bell, and more ready to run in the direction in which it summons us. "*Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.*" Here is our proper language. Whether the Word of the Lord summons us from our retirement into the midst of our brethren, or from thence into retirement again, may our language ever be, "Speak, Lord for Thy servant heareth." The Word of the Lord, and the attentive ear of a servant, are all we need to carry us safely and happily onward.

Now, this path of obedience is by no means an easy one; it involves the constant abandonment of self, and can only be pursued as the eye is steadily kept on God, and the conscience kept under the action of His truth. True, there is a rich reward in every act of obedience, yet flesh and blood must be set aside, and this is no easy work. Witness the path of our prophet. He was first called to take his place by the brook Cherith, to be fed by ravens! How could flesh and blood understand this?

Then again, when the brook failed, he is called away to a distant city of Zidon, there to be nourished by a destitute widow who seemed to be at the very point of dying of starvation! Here was the command: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

And what confirmation did Elijah derive from appearances, upon his arrival at this place? None whatever; but everything to fill him with doubts and fears had he been looking at circumstances in the matter. "So he arose, and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

This was the scene that presented itself to the eye of the prophet when he had arrived at his divinely appointed destination. Truly a gloomy and depressing one to flesh and blood. But Elijah conferred not with flesh and blood; his spirit was sustained by the immutable Word of Jehovah; his confidence was based upon the faithfulness of God, and he needed no aid from things around him. The horizon might look dark and heavy to mortal vision, but the eye of faith could pierce the clouds, and see beyond them all "the firm foundation which is laid for faith in Jehovah's excellent word."

How precious, then, is the Word of God! Well might the psalmist say, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever." Precious heritage! Pure, incorruptible, immortal truth! How should we bless our God for having made it our inalienable portion — a portion which, when all sublunary things shall have vanished from view, when the world shall have passed away and the lust thereof, when all flesh shall have been consumed as withered grass, shall prove to the faithful a real, an eternal, an enduring substance. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."

But what were the circumstances which met the prophet's eye upon his approach to Zarephath? A widow and her son starving, two sticks, and a handful of meal! And yet the word was, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." How trying, how deeply mysterious, was all this!

Elijah, however, staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. He knew that it was the Most High and Almighty God, the possessor of Heaven and earth, that was to meet his necessities; hence, though there had been neither oil nor meal, it would have made no matter to him, for he looked beyond circumstances to the God of circumstances. He saw not the widow, but God. He looked not at the handful of meal, but at the divine command; therefore his spirit was perfectly calm and unruffled in the midst of circumstances which would have crushed the spirit of one walking by sight, and he was able, without a shadow of doubt, to say "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Here we have the reply of faith to the language of unbelief. "Thus saith the Lord" settles everything. The moment the spirit apprehends God's promise, there is an end to the reasonings of unbelief. Unbelief puts circumstances between the soul and God; faith puts God between the soul and circumstances. This is a very important difference. May we walk in the power and energy of faith, to the praise of Him whom faith ever honours!

But there is another point in this lovely scene to be particularly noticed: it is the way in which death ever hovers around the spirit of one not walking by faith. "That we may eat it and die" is the language of the widow. Death and unbelief are inseparably linked together. The spirit can only be conducted along the path of life by the energy of faith: hence if faith be not in energy, there is no life, no power, no elevation.

Thus was it with this poor widow: her hope of life was based upon the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil: beyond these she saw no springs of life, no hope of continuance. Her soul knew not as yet the real blessedness of communion with the living God to whom alone belong the issues from death. She was not yet able against hope to believe in hope. Alas, what a poor, frail, tottering thing is that hope which rests only on a cruse of oil and a barrel of meal! How scanty must be those expectations which only rest on the creature!

And are we not all but too prone to lean upon something quite as mean and paltry in God's view as a handful of meal? Truly we are; and it must be so where God is not apprehended by the soul. To faith it is either God or nothing. A handful of meal will afford, in the hand of God and to the view of faith, as efficient materials as the cattle upon a thousand hills. "We have here but five loaves and two small fishes; but *what are these amongst so many?*" This is the language of the human heart; but faith never says what are *these* amongst so many? but what is *God* among so many? Unbelief says *we* are not able; faith says, but *God is* well able.

And would it not be well, ere we turn from this interesting point in our subject, to apply these principles to the poor, conscience-smitten sinner? How often is such an one found clinging to some vain resource for the pardon of his sins, rather than to the accomplished work of Christ upon the cross, which has forever satisfied the claims of divine justice, and ought therefore, surely, to satisfy the cravings of his guilty conscience.

"I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." Such is the language of one who had not as yet learned to look beyond all human aid, straight to Jesus. "*I have no man,*" says the poor, guilty, unbelieving sinner: but I have *Jesus*, says the believer; and he may add, Thus saith the Lord, The cleansing efficacy of the blood shall not fail, nor its preciousness diminish, until the time that the Lord shall have safely housed His ransomed forever in His own heavenly mansions.

Hence, if these pages should meet the eye of any poor, halting, trembling, fearful sinner, I would invite him to take comfort from the precious truth that God has, in His infinite grace, set the cross of Jesus between him and his sins, if only he will believe the divine testimony. The great difference between a believer and an unbeliever is this: the former has Christ between him and his sins; the latter has his sins between him and Christ.

Now, with the former, Christ is the all-engrossing object: he looks not at the enormity of his sin, but at the value of the blood and the preciousness of the person of Christ: he knows that God is not

now on the judgement-seat, but on the mercy-seat: if He were on the former, His thoughts would be simply occupied about the question of sin, but being on the latter, His thoughts are, blessed be His name, as purely occupied about the blood. Oh for more simple and abiding communion with the mind of Heaven, and more complete abstraction from the things and thoughts of earth! The Lord grant more of both to all His saints!

It has been already observed that the man of faith must be emptied from vessel to vessel; each successive scene and stage of the believer's life is but his entrance upon a new form in the school of Christ, where he has to learn some fresh and, of course, more difficult lesson.

But, it may be asked, what more trying circumstances had Elijah to grapple with at Zarephath than at Cherith? Was it not better to be cast upon human sympathies than to have ravens as his channel of supply? And further, was it not more pleasing to the spirit to be domesticated with human beings than to dwell in the loneliness and solitude of the brook Cherith? All this might have been so, no doubt; yet solitude has its sweets, and association its trials. There are selfish interests which work amongst men, and hinder that refined and exquisite enjoyment which human society ought to yield, and which it will yield, when humanity stands forth in its divinely-imparted perfections.

Our prophet heard no such words as "*me and my son*" when he took up his abode by the brook. There was there no selfish interest acting as a barrier to his sustenance and enjoyment. No, but the moment he passed from his retirement into human society, then he was called to feel that the human heart does not like to have its own objects in the least interfered with; he was called to enter into the deep meaning of the words "*me and my son*," which unfold the hidden springs of selfishness, which actuate humanity in its fallen condition.

But it will doubtless be observed that it was natural for the widow's heart to entertain thoughts of herself and her son in preference to any one else, and surely it was natural; it is what nature ever does. Harken to the following words of a genuine child

of nature: "Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" (1 Sam. 25: 11)

Nature will ever seek its own first; nor does it come within the compass of this perishing world so to fill the human soul as to make it overflow for the benefit of others. It is the province of God alone to do this. It is utterly in vain to try to expand the heart of man by any instrumentality save the abundant grace of God. This it is which will cause him to open wide the door of his affections to every needy applicant. Human benevolence may do much where abundant resources prevent the possibility of personal privation, but grace alone will enable a man to trample personal interests under foot to meet the claims of another. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." This is the world's principle, and nothing can make us unlearn it but the knowledge of the fact that God has done well for us, and, moreover, that it is our best interest to let Him continue to do so unto the end.

Now it was the knowledge of this *divine* principle that enabled our prophet to say, "Make me thereof a little cake *first* and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son." Elijah was, in his address, simply putting in the divine claim upon the widow's resources; and, as we know, the result of a true and ready response to that claim will be a rich harvest of blessing to the soul. There was, however, a demand upon the widow's faith in all this. she was called to act a trying and difficult part, in the energy of faith in a divine promise, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

And is it not thus with every believer? Undoubtedly it is; we must act in faith. The promise of God must ever constitute the great moving principle in the soul of the Christian. There would have been no room for the exercise of faith on the part of the widow had the barrel been full; but when it was exhausted, when she was reduced to her last handful, to be told to give of that handful to a stranger first, was surely a large demand, to which nothing but faith could have enabled her to respond.

But the Lord often deals with His people as He dealt with His disciples in the matter of feeding the multitude. "This He said to prove them, for He Himself knew what He would do." He frequently tells us to take a step involving considerable trial, and in the very act of taking it we not only see the reason of it, but also get strength to proceed. In fact, all the divine claims upon us for action are based upon the principle involved in the command to the children of Israel of old, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

Whither were they to go? Through the sea. Strange path! Yet behind this trying command we see grace providing the ability to execute it in the word to Moses, "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14: 16). Faith enables a man, being called, to go out not knowing whither he goes.

But there is more than the mere principle of obedience to be learned from this truly interesting scene between Elijah and the widow of Zarephath: we learn, also, that nothing but the superior power of divine grace can lift the human mind above the freezing atmosphere of selfishness in which fallen man lives, and moves, and has his being. The effulgence of God's benevolence shining in upon the soul disperses those mists in which the world is enveloped, and enables a man to think and act upon higher and nobler principles than those which actuate the moving mass around him. This poor widow had left her house influenced by no higher motive than self-interest and self-preservation, and having no more brilliant object before her mind than death.

And is it in any wise different with multitudes around us? Yea, is it a whit better in the case of any unregenerate man on earth? Not a whit. The most illustrious, the most intellectual, the most learned — in a word, every man upon whose spirit the light of divine grace has never shone, will be found, in God's estimation, like this poor widow, influenced by motives of self-interest and self-preservation, and having no brighter prospect before him than death.

The truth of God, however, speedily alters the aspect of things. In the case of the widow it acted most powerfully: it sent her back to

her house occupied about and interested for another, and with her soul filled with cheering thoughts of life. And so will it ever be. Let but the soul get into communion with the truth and grace of God, and it is at once delivered from this present evil world, it is turned aside out of the current which is rapidly hurrying millions away upon its surface. It becomes actuated by heavenly motives, and animated by heavenly objects.

Grace teaches a man to live and act for others. The more our souls taste the sweetness of redeeming love, the more earnest will be our desire to serve others. Oh that we all felt more deeply and abidingly the constraining power of the love of Christ, in this day of lamentable coldness and indifference! Would to God we could all live and act in the remembrance that we are not our own, but bought with a price!

The widow of Zarephath was taught this truth. The Lord not only put His claim to the handful of meal and the cruse of oil, but also laid His hand upon her son — the cherished object of her affections. Death visits the house in which the Lord's prophet, in company with the widow and her son, were feeding together on the precious fruits of divine benevolence. "It came to pass, after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him."

Now this son, as we know, had, in common with herself, stood in her way in the matter of her ready response to the divine claim as put forward by Elijah; hence there is solemn instruction for the saint in the death of this child. So surely as we allow *any object*, whether it be parent or child, husband or wife, brother or sister, to obstruct us in our path of simple obedience and devotedness to Christ, we may rest assured that object will be removed. This widow had given her son a higher place in her thoughts than the Lord's prophet, and the son was taken from her that she might learn that it was not merely, "the handful of meal" that should be held in subjection to the Lord and in readiness for Him, but also her dearest earthly object.

It needs no small measure of the spirit of Christ to hold everything in mere stewardship for God. We are so prone to look

upon things as ours, instead of remembering that all we have, and all we are, belongs to the Lord, and should ever be given up at His call. Nor is this a mere matter of rightful obedience; it is for our lasting benefit and happiness.

The widow responded to God's claim on her handful of meal; and what follows? She and her house are sustained for years! Again the Lord lays His hand upon her son; and what follows? Her son is raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, thus teaching her that the Lord could not only sustain life, but impart it. Resurrection-power is brought to bear upon her circumstances, and she receives her son now, as she had received her supplies before, directly from the hand of the Lord God of Israel.

How happy to be a dependent upon such bounty! How happy to go to our barrel of meal, or our cruse of oil, and find it daily replenished by our Father's generous hand! How happy to hold the dearest object of our affections in the power of resurrection ties! Such are the privileges of the weakest believer in Jesus.

Before, however, I turn from this branch of our subject, I would observe that the effect which the divine visitation produced upon this widow was to awaken a solemn inquiry in her conscience as to her sin. "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance?" When the Lord comes near to us, there will always be observed a divine quickness and sensitiveness of conscience which are most earnestly to be sought after.

One may often pass on from day to day in the ordinary routine of life, in the enjoyment, too, of a replenished barrel and cruse, without much deep exercise of conscience before God. The latter will only be found where there is really close walking with God, or some special visitation of His hand. Had the Lord merely met the poor widow's need from day to day, there might never have been a question of "sin" raised in her mind; but when death entered, conscience began to work, for death is the wages of sin.

There is a twofold action in all the divine dealings with us, namely, an action of *truth*, and an action of *grace*. The former discovers the evil, the latter puts it away; that unfolds what man is,

this what God is; that brings out into the light the hidden workings of evil in the heart of man, this brings out, in contrast, the rich and exhaustless springs of grace in the heart of God. Now, both are needful: *truth*, for the maintenance of God's glory; *grace*, for the establishment of our blessing; that, for the vindication of the divine character and attributes, this for the perfect repose of the sinner's heart and conscience.

How blessed to know that both “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The divine dealings with the widow of Zarephath would not have been complete had they not elicited from her the confession contained in the last verse of our chapter, “By *this* I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is *truth*.” She had learnt *grace* in the marvellous supply of her need; she learnt *truth* in the death of her son.

And if we were only more spiritually sensitive and quick-sighted, we should at all times perceive these two features in our Father's mode of dealing with us. We are the constant recipients of His grace, and again and again we get examples of His truth in the dealings of His hand which are more particularly designed to bring out the evil from the hidden chambers of the heart, in order that we may judge and put it away. While we see our barrel and cruse replenished, conscience is apt to slumber, but when Jehovah knocks at the door of our hearts by some chastening dispensation, forthwith it wakes up and enters with vigour upon the seasonable work of self-judgement.

Now, while we cannot too strongly deprecate that form of self-examination which frequently genders doubt as to the fact of the soul's acceptance, yet we must remember that *self must be judged* or we shall break down altogether. The believer is not told to examine himself with any such idea as that the examination may issue in the discovery that he is not in the faith. This idea is often based upon an unsound interpretation of 2 Cor. 13: 5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,” etc.

Now, the idea in the mind of the apostle was the very reverse of what is sought to be deduced from his words, as may at once be seen by a little attention to the context. It would seem that the

assembly at Corinth had given a place amongst them to certain false apostles who presumed to call in question the ministry of the Apostle Paul, thus rendering it necessary for the latter to enter upon a defence of his apostleship, which he does, first, by a reference to his general course of service and testimony; and secondly, by a touching appeal to the Corinthian saints. "Since," says he, "ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me . . . examine yourselves."

The most powerful and, to them at least affecting proof of the divine authority of his ; apostleship was to be deduced from the fact that they were in the faith. It cannot therefore for a moment be supposed that he would have told them to examine themselves in order to prove his heavenly mission if that examination were to issue in the discovery, that they were not in the faith at all: on the contrary, it was because he had a well-grounded assurance that they were "sanctified in Christ Jesus," that he could confidently appeal to them as an evidence that his mission was from above.

There is, however, considerable difference between what is called "self-examination" and self-judgement; not so much in the abstract things themselves as in the ideas which we attach to them. It is a most blessed exercise to judge nature — honestly, solemnly and rigidly to judge that evil nature which we carry about with us, and which ever clogs and hinders us in running the race set before us. The Lord grant us all more spiritual power to exercise this judgement continually. But then we must take great care that our examination of self does not savour of mistrusting God. It is upon the ground of God's grace and faithfulness that I judge myself if *God be not God, there is an end of everything.*

But there was also a voice in this visitation for Elijah. He had presented himself to the widow in the character of a man of God, and he therefore needed to establish his claims to that character. This Jehovah graciously did for him by the resurrection of the child. "By *this* I know," said she, "that thou art a man of God." It was resurrection that vindicated his claim upon her confidence.

There must be the exhibition of a measure of resurrection power in the life of the man of God ere his claim to that character can be fully established. This power will show itself in the form of

victory over self in all its odious workings. The believer is risen with Christ — he is made a partaker of the divine nature, but he is still in the world, and bears about with him a body of humiliation; and if he does not deny himself, he will soon find his character as a man of God called in question.

It would, however, be but a miserable object merely to seek *self-vindication*. The prophet had a higher and nobler aim, namely, to establish the truth of the Word of the Lord in his mouth. This is the proper object of the man of God. His own character and reputation should be matters of small moment with him, save as they stand connected with the Word of the Lord in his mouth. It was simply for the purpose of maintaining the divine origin of the gospel which he preached that the Apostle Paul entered upon the defence of his apostleship in his Epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians. It mattered little to him what they thought of Paul, but it mattered much what they thought of Paul's gospel. Hence, for their sakes, he was anxious to prove that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

How important, then, was it for the prophet to have such a testimony to the divine origin of his ministry before entering upon the scenes in which he is seen moving in 1 Kings 18! He gained thus much at least by his retirement at Zarephath; and surely it was not a little. His spirit was blessedly confirmed; he received a divine seal to his ministry; he approved himself to the conscience of one with whom he had sojourned for a long period, and was enabled to start afresh upon his public career with the happy assurance that he was a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

[I may just add a word here on the subject of self-vindication. It is truly sorrowful when the servant of God is obliged to vindicate himself; it shows there must be something wrong either in himself or in those who have rendered it needful for him thus to act. When, however, such a course becomes necessary, there is one grand object to be kept clearly before the mind, namely, the glory of Christ, and the purity of the truth committed to his trust. It too frequently happens that when any charge is brought either against our ministry or our personal character, the pride of our hearts is drawn out, and we are quick to stand up in self-defence. Now, we should remember

that, apart from our connection with Christ and His saints, we are but vile atoms of the dust, utterly unworthy of a thought or word; it should therefore be far from our thoughts to seek the establishment of our own reputation. We have been constituted the depositaries, to a certain extent, of the reputation of Christ; and provided we preserve that unsullied, we need not be careful about self. The Lord grant us all grace to walk in the abiding consciousness of our high dignities and holy responsibilities as the “epistle of Christ, known and read of all men”!]]

We have now arrived at the close of a very important stage of Elijah's history, embracing a period of three years and a half, during which he was hidden from the view of Israel. We have been occupied simply with the consideration of those principles of truth which lie on the surface of Elijah's personal history. But may we not draw instruction from his course viewed in a mystic sense? I believe we may. The reference of Christ Himself to the prophet's mission to the Gentile widow may justly lead us to see therein the blessed foreshadowing of the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church of God.

“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow” (Luke 4:25-6). The Lord Jesus had presented Himself to Israel as the prophet of God, but found no response; the daughter of Zion refused to hear the voice of her Lord. “The gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” were answered by the carnal inquiry, “Is not this Joseph's son?” He therefore finds relief for His spirit, in the view of Israel's scorn and rejection, in the happy reflection that there were objects beyond Jewish bounds to whom the divine grace of which He was the channel could flow out in all its richness and purity.

The grace of God is such that if it be stopped by the pride, unbelief, or hardness of heart of some, it will only flow more copiously to others, and so, “Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength. And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My

servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for *a light to the Gentiles*, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa. 49: 5-6).

The precious truth of the call of the Gentiles is largely taught in Scripture, both by type and precept, and it might be serviceable at another time to enter fully upon the consideration of it in its various ramifications; but my object, in this paper, is rather to consider the life and ministry of our prophet in a simple and practical way, with the hope that the Lord would be graciously pleased to acknowledge such simple reflections for the comfort and edification of His people of every name and denomination.

Part 3 - THE HOUSE OF AHAB

We must now leave our prophet, for a season, and turn our attention to the sad condition of things in Israel during the time that he was hidden with God. Terrible indeed must be the condition of things on earth when “the heaven is shut up.” Sterile and dreary must be the aspect of this lower world when Heaven withholds its refreshing showers, and specially of that land which was to “drink water of the rain of heaven.” Egypt might not have regarded much the shutting up of Heaven, seeing she had never been wont to look thither for her supplies. She had her resources in herself. “My river is mine own,” was her independent language.

But such was not the case with the Lord's land — “the land of hills and valleys.” If Heaven yielded not its supplies, all was parched and sterile. Israel could not say, “My river is mine own.” No; they were ever taught to look up; their eyes were always to be upon the Lord, as the Lord's eyes were ever upon them. Hence, when anything arose to hinder the intercourse between Heaven and earth, the land of Canaan was made to feel it with painful intensity.

Thus it was “in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land.” Israel was made to feel the dreadful consequences of departure from their only source of real blessing. “There was sore famine in Samaria, and Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we

may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them, to pass throughout it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.”

Israel had sinned, and Israel must feel the rod of Jehovah's righteous anger. What a humbling picture of God's ancient people, to see their king going forth to look for grass! What a contrast between all this and the rich abundance and glory of Solomon's day! But God had been grossly dishonoured, and His truth rejected. Jezebel had sent forth the pestilential influence of her principles by the instrumentality of her wicked prophets — Baal's altar had superseded the altar of God; hence the Heaven above was iron, and the earth beneath brass; the physical aspect of things was but the expression of Israel's hardness of heart and low moral condition.

Now there is not so much as a word about God in Ahab's directions to his servants — not a syllable about the sin that had called down the heavy displeasure and judgement of God upon the land. No; the word is, “Go unto all fountains and brooks.” Such was Ahab's thought, his poor grovelling thought; his heart turned not, in true humility, to Jehovah; he cried not to Him in the hour of his need; hence his word is, “peradventure we may find grass. “ God is shut out, and self is the all-engrossing object. Provided he could find *grass*, he cared not about finding *God*

He could have enjoyed himself in the midst of Jezebel's idolatrous prophets, had not the horrors of famine driven him forth: and then, instead of searching out the cause of the famine, in true self-judgement and humility, and seeking for pardon and restoration at the hand of God, he goes forth, in impenitent selfishness, to look for grass. Alas! he had sold himself to work wickedness; he had become the slave of Jezebel; his palace had become a cage of every unclean bird; Baal's prophets, like so many vultures, hovered around his throne, and from thence spread the leaven of idolatry over the whole land.

Oh, it is a truly awful thing to allow the heart to depart from the Lord. One cannot tell where it may end. Ahab was an Israelite, but he had allowed himself to be ensnared by a false religious

system, at the head of which was Jezebel his wife; he had made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and was driven headlong into the most abandoned wickedness. There is no one so bad as the man who turns aside from the ways of God. Such an one is sure to plunge into more profound depths of wickedness than even the ordinary victims of sin and Satan. The devil seems to take special delight in making such an one an instrument in carrying out his malignant designs against the truth of God.

If you have ever been taught to value the ways of truth and holiness, if you have ever taken delight in God and His ways, be watchful; “keep thy heart with all diligence;” beware of false religious influence; you are moving through a scene in which the very atmosphere you breathe is noxious, and destructive of spiritual life. The enemy has with hellish sagacity — a sagacity sharpened by well-nigh six thousand years' acquaintance with the constitution of the human mind — laid his snares on all sides of you, and nothing but permanent communion with your heavenly Father will avail to preserve your soul. Remember Ahab, and pray continually to be kept from temptation.

The following passage of Scripture may well be used, in connection with Ahab, as a solemn and seasonable warning: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited” (Jer. 17: 5-6).

Such was the wretched Ahab — wretched though favoured with a diadem and a sceptre. He cared neither for God nor his people. In his sayings and doings, on the melancholy occasion to which we are referring, we find as little about Israel as about God. There is not one word about the people that had been committed to his care, and who ought, after God, to have been his great object. His earthly mind seems to have been unable to reach beyond “the horses and mules.” Such were the objects of Ahab's anxious solicitude in the day of Israel's direful calamity.

Alas, what a contrast between all this low and grovelling selfishness and the noble spirit of the man after God's own heart, who, when the land was trembling beneath the heavy stroke of Jehovah's chastening rod, could say, "Is it not I that have commanded the people to be numbered: *even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed*; but as for *these sheep*, what have they done? let Thy hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued" (1 Chr. 21: 17).

Here was the true spirit of a king. David, in the spirit of his blessed Master, would expose his own bosom to the stroke, in order that the sheep might escape; he would "stand between them and the foe"; he would turn the sceptre into a shepherd's crook; he thought not of his "horses and mules"; yea, he thought not of himself or his father's house, but of the people of God's pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Happy, ineffably happy, will it be for Israel's scattered tribes to find themselves again under the tender care of the true David.

It might be profitable to follow out a little more fully the history of Ahab; to dwell upon his unprincipled treatment of the righteous Naboth; of the alluring influence exerted by him over the mind of the good king Jehoshaphat, and of many other circumstances in his unhappy reign; but all this would lead us too far from our subject. We shall therefore advert for a few moments to the character of an important member of Ahab's household, and then return to Elijah.

Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, was one who, in the secret of his own spirit, feared the Lord, but who was planted in a most unhallowed atmosphere. The house of the wicked Ahab, and his still more wicked consort, must have been a painful school for the righteous soul of Obadiah; and so he found it. He was hindered in service and testimony. What he did for the Lord was done by stealth. He was afraid to act openly and decidedly; yet he did quite enough to show what he would have done had he been planted in a more congenial soil, and cherished by a more healthful atmosphere. "He took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." This was a most precious token of

devotedness of heart to the Lord — a blessed triumph of divine principle over the most untoward circumstances.

Thus it was with Jonathan in the house of Saul. He, too, was sadly hindered in his service to God and to Israel. He should have stood forth in more entire separation from the evil in which his father lived, and moved; his place at Saul's table should have been vacant as well as David's: the cave of Adullam would have been his proper place, where, in holy companionship with the rejected David and his despised band of followers, he might have found a wider and more suited range in which to manifest his affectionate devotedness to God and His anointed.

Human expediency, however, might, and doubtless would, have recommended Jonathan to remain in Saul's house, and Obadiah to remain in Ahab's house, as being “the sphere in which Providence had placed them”; but expediency is not faith, nor will it aid a man in his path of service, whatever it may be. Faith will ever lead a man to break through the freezing rules of human expediency, in order that it may express itself in a way not to be mistaken.

Jonathan felt constrained at times to leave the table of Saul in order that he might embrace David: but he should have abandoned it altogether; he should have cast in his lot entirely with David; he ought not to have rested satisfied with speaking *for* his brother, he should have identified himself with him. But he did not do so, and therefore he fell on Mount Gilboa, by the hand of the uncircumcised. Thus, in his life he was harassed and hindered by the unrighteous principle of rule which Saul had set up to entangle and bind the consciences of the faithful, and in his death he was ingloriously mingled with the uncircumcised.

Just so it was with Obadiah. It was his lot to stand in connection with the man who occupied the lowest step of that ladder of apostasy whereby the kings of Israel had descended from original principles. Hence he was obliged to act stealthily for God and His servants; he was afraid of Ahab and Jezebel; he lacked boldness and energy to stand out in decided testimony against all abominations; he had no room for the development of his renewed energies or affections; his soul was withered by the noxious vapours around

him, and he could therefore exert but little influence on his day and generation.

Hence, while Elijah was boldly confronting Ahab, and openly serving the Lord, Obadiah was openly serving Ahab, and stealthily serving the Lord. While Elijah was breathing the holy atmosphere of Jehovah's presence, Obadiah was breathing the polluted atmosphere of Ahab's wicked court. While Elijah was receiving his daily supplies from the hand of the God of Israel, Obadiah was ranging the country in search of grass for Ahab's horses.

Truly a most striking contrast! And is there not at this moment many an Obadiah similarly occupied? Is there not many a God-fearing man sharing, in common with the children of this world, its death and misery, and labouring in co-operation with them to avert its impending ruin? Doubtless there is. And is this fit work for such? Should "the mules and horses of an ungodly world engross the thoughts and energies of the Christian instead of the interests of the Church of God? Ah no! it should not be so. The Christian should have a nobler end in view — a higher and more heavenly sphere in which to use his energies. God, and not Ahab, demands and deserves our devotion.

This is a very wide question, and there are few amongst us that may not learn a lesson from it. Let us ask ourselves honestly, as before the Searcher of hearts, what are we doing? What object are we carrying out? What end have we in view? Are we sowing to the flesh? Are we working for merely earthly objects? Have we no higher end in view than self or this present world?

Oh these are searching questions, when rightly put! The tendency of the human heart and affections is ever downward — ever toward earth and the things of earth. The palace of Ahab holds out far more powerful attractions to our fallen nature than the lonely banks of Cherith or the house of the starving widow of Zarephath. But ah, *let us think of the end!* The end alone is the true criterion by which to judge in such matters. "Until I went into *the sanctuary of God*; then understood I *their end* " (Ps. 73: 17).

Elijah knew, by being in the sanctuary, that Ahab stood in a slippery place; that his house would speedily crumble in the dust; that all his pomp and glory was about to end in the lonely tomb, and his immortal spirit to be summoned to render its final account. These things the holy man of God thoroughly understood, and he was therefore well content to stand apart from it all. His leathern girdle, his homely fare, his lonely path, were far better, he felt, than all the pleasures of Ahab's court. Such was his judgement, and we shall see, ere we close this paper, that his judgement was sound.

“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” Would that all who love the name of Jesus were more uncompromising and energetic in their testimony for Him! The time is rapidly approaching when we would give worlds that we had been more *true and real* in our ways here below. We are too lukewarm, too much inclined to make terms with the world and the flesh, too ready to exchange the leathern girdle for the robe in which Ahab and Jezebel are most willing to array us.

May the Lord give all His people grace to testify against this world that the deeds thereof are evil, and to stand apart from its ways, its maxims and principles; in a word, from everything which properly belongs to it. “The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.” Let us then cast off the works of darkness and stand clothed in the armour of light; let us, as those that are risen with Christ, set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth; having “our citizenship in heaven,” let us, with unceasing eagerness, “look for the Saviour from thence, who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Part 4 - THE PROPHET ON MOUNT CARMEL

In the opening verse of 1 Kings 18 a new order is issued to our prophet. “And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.”

Here Elijah is summoned away from his retirement at Zarephath, to make his appearance in public and stand again before king Ahab. To one occupying the position, and exhibiting the spirit, of a true servant, it matters not what summons he receives. Whether it be “Go *hide* thyself,” or “Go *show* thyself,” he is ready, through grace, to obey. The Lord had been training His servant for three years and a half in secret. At Cherith and Zarephath He had taught him many important lessons; and when the time was come for his showing unto Israel, he was called to leave the desert and appear again as the public witness of Jehovah.

Nor did he hesitate. No, not for a moment, however much he might have preferred retirement to the stormy scenes and harassing vicissitudes of public life. Elijah was *a servant*, and that was enough. He was as ready to confront the angry Ahab, and all the prophets of Baal, as he had been to seclude himself for three years and a half. Truly we may well covet the spirit of a servant — a humble, obedient servant. Such a spirit will carry us through many difficulties; will save us from much contention; will send us along the path of service while others are disputing about it. If only we be willing to obey, and to serve, we shall never lack opportunity, nor be at a loss as to the path we should pursue.

[In every age the servant character is marked by the Holy Ghost as one of special value. It is, in fact, the only thing that will stand in times of general declension. Of this we have numerous examples in Scripture. When the house of Eli was about to fall before the divine judgement, Samuel occupied the position of a servant whose ear was opened to hear. His word was, “Speak, Lord, for Thy *servant* heareth.” When all Israel had fled from the face of the Philistine champion, the servant character again stood prominently forth. “Thy *servant* will go and fight,” etc. The Lord Jesus Himself had the title of Servant applied to Him by Jehovah, in the words of the prophet, “Behold My *Servant*,” etc. Furthermore, when the Church had failed, and had become “the great house,” “the *servant* of the Lord” was told how he ought to carry himself. And lastly, it is mentioned as one of the special features of the heavenly Jerusalem, that “His *servants* shall *serve* Him.” The Lord grant us more of this spirit!.]

We have already had occasion to notice the prophet's unhesitating obedience to the Word of the Lord. Such obedience will ever involve the abandonment of self. To be told, for example, to leave one's sweet retreat in order to appear before an angry tyrant who, with his wicked queen, led on to the contest a host of idolatrous prophets, called for no small measure of self-renunciation. But Elijah, through grace, was ready. He felt he was not his own. *He was a servant*, and as such ever stood with girded loins and open ears to attend his Master's summons, whatever it might be. Blessed attitude! May there be many found therein!

Elijah, therefore, goes to meet king Ahab, and we are called to follow him now into one of the most important scenes of his life.

Before, however, he comes in contact with Ahab, he crosses the path of Obadiah, and his meeting with him is perfectly characteristic. Obadiah certainly does not meet the prophet with that affectionate cordiality which ought to appear in the bearing of one brother towards another, but rather in the cold formality of one who had been moving much in the world's society. "Art thou that *my lord* Elijah?"

Now, though all this might have been occasioned by the overawing solemnity of Elijah's appearance and manner, still the thought forces itself upon one that there ought to have been more holy familiarity between two servants of the Lord. Elijah, too, seems to maintain this distance. "I am," said he; "go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." Elijah felt himself to be the depositary of the secret of the Lord, of which secret his brother knew nothing.

And how could he? Ahab's house was not the place to obtain an entrance into the divine counsels. Obadiah was out on a mission perfectly in keeping with the place from whence he had come, and with the person who had sent him; and so was Elijah. The former had as his immediate object grass — if peradventure he might find it; and as his ultimate object, the preservation of Ahab's horses and mules; the latter had as his immediate object the announcement of Jehovah's indubitable purpose concerning rain; and as his ultimate object, the bringing back of the nation to its early faith and devotedness.

True they were both men of God; and, moreover, it may be said by some that Obadiah was as much in his place as Elijah, seeing he was serving his master. No doubt he was serving his master; but should Ahab have been his master? I believe not. I believe his service to Ahab was not the result of communion with God. True it did not rob him of his name and character as one that feared the Lord greatly, for the Holy Ghost has graciously recorded this concerning him; but truly it was a miserable thing for one that feared the Lord greatly to own as his master the worst of Israel's apostate kings. Elijah would not have done so. We cannot think of him as going forth on such a mission as that which was commanding the energies of his more worldly brother. Elijah would not own Ahab as his *master*, though he was bound to own him as his *King*.

There is a great difference between being a *subject* and one in a position under a monarch. People argue thus: "The powers that be are ordained of God," therefore it is right to hold office under them. But those who argue thus seem to lose sight of the manifest distinction between *subject to* and *co-operating with* the powers that be: the former is a sound and scriptural service — an act of positive obedience to God; the latter is an unsound and unscriptural assumption of worldly authority, for the wielding of which we have no direction, and which, moreover, will be found a sad obstruction in the path of the servant of God

We would not enter into judgement upon those who feel they can enlist their energies in the government of this world; but this much we would say — they will find themselves in an extremely awkward position in reference to the service of their heavenly Master. The principles of this world are diametrically opposed to those of God, and it is therefore hard to conceive how a man can be carrying out both at the same time.

Obadiah is a remarkable example of this. Had he been more openly on the Lord's side, he would have had no need to say, "Was it not told my lord what I did?" His hiding the prophets seems, in his estimation, to have been such a remarkable thing that he wondered if all had not heard it. Elijah had no need to ask such a question; it was well known "what he did." His acts of service to God were no phenomena in his history. And why? Because he was not

trammelled by the arrangements of Ahab's house. *He was free*, and could therefore act for God without reference to the thoughts of Ahab or Jezebel.

In acting thus, however, he had to lie under the charge of troubling Israel. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" The more faithful one is to God and His truth, the more exposed he is to this charge. If all be allowed to sleep "in dead supineness," the god of this world will be well pleased, and his domain untroubled; but only let some faithful one make his appearance, and he is sure to be regarded as a troubler, and an intruder upon peace and good order.

But it is well to have that peace and order broken up which stand connected with the open denial of the Lord's truth and name. The hearts of the earthly-minded may only be occupied with the question, "Is it peace?" utterly regardless as to whether that peace is procured at the expense of truth and holiness. Nature loves ease, and may often be found, even amongst Christians, pleading for peace and quietness, where faithfulness to Christ and His principles would call for plain dealing with unsound doctrine or evil practice.

The tendency of the age is to hold all religious questions in abeyance. The things pertaining to the world and the flesh are of far too much importance, in the estimate of this generation, to have them interfered with for a moment by questions of eternal importance. Elijah, however, thought not so. He seems to have felt that the peaceful slumber of sin must be interrupted at all cost. He beheld the nation wrapped in the deep sleep of idolatry, and he thought it well to be the instrument of raising a storm around them.

So it was, and so it is. The storm of controversy is always preferable to the calm of sin and worldliness. Truly happy is it when there is no need of raising such a storm; but when it is needed — when the enemy would stretch forth over the people of God "the leaden sceptre" of unholy repose — it is a matter of thankfulness to find that there is life enough even to break in upon such repose. Had there been no Elijah in Israel in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, had all been like Obadiah or the seven thousand, Baal and his prophets might have held undisputed sway over the minds of the people.

But God raised up a man who cared not about his own ease; no, nor about the nation's ease, if that ease were to be purchased at the expense of God's honour and Israel's early principles. He feared not, in the strength of the Lord, to face a terrific array of eight hundred and fifty prophets, whose living depended upon the nation's delusion, headed, as they were, by a furious woman who could turn her weak-minded lord whithersoever she would.

All this, surely, called for no small amount of spiritual vigour and energy. It needed deep and powerful convictions of the reality *of* divine truth, and a very clear insight into Israel's low and degraded condition, to enable a man to leave his quiet retreat at Zarephath and burst into the midst of Baal's votaries, thus to bring upon himself a fierce storm of opposition from every quarter. Elijah might, to speak after the manner of men, have remained in quiet retirement, in undisturbed repose, had he been satisfied to let Baal alone, and to allow the strongholds of idolatry to remain untouched. But this he could not do, and therefore he comes forth and meets the angry Ahab with these solemn and heart-searching words, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast served Baalim."

This was tracing the evil up to its right source. It was departure from God and His holy commandments that had brought all this trouble upon them. Men are ever prone to forget the sin that has occasioned trouble, and think only of the trouble; but true wisdom will ever lead us to look from the trouble to the procuring cause.

Thus, too, when unsound doctrine has insidiously crept in, and gained power over many minds — if some faithful one should feel called to make a firm and decided stand against it, he must count upon being regarded as a troubler, and as being the cause of all the commotion consequent upon such acting; whereas the intelligent and reflecting mind will at once trace the matter, not to the faithful one who has made a stand for truth against error, but to him who may have introduced the error, and to those who have received and entertained it.

True, the defender of truth will need to watch his spirit and temper, lest, while he attacks error in doctrine, he fall into evil in practice. Many who have set out in real sincerity of heart to vindicate some neglected or disputed truth have failed in this particular, and have thus, in a great degree, nullified their valuable testimony; for their sagacious enemy is always ready to act upon the narrow-mindedness and unreasonableness of men by leading them to fasten upon the petty infirmities of temper, and lose sight of the important principle advocated.

But our prophet entered the arena well equipped; he had come from "the secret place of the Most High"; he had been learning, in solitude, those lessons of self-judgement and self-subjugation which could alone qualify him for the momentous scenes on which he was about to enter. Elijah was no angry or stormy controversialist; he had been too much in the secret of the divine presence for that; he had been blessedly solemnized in his spirit ere he was called to confront Baal's host of prophets. Hence he stands before them in all the calm elevation and holy dignity which ever marked his bearing. We see no haste about him, no perturbation, no hesitancy. He was before God, and therefore he was self-possessed and tranquil.

Now it is in such circumstances that a man's spirit is really tested. Nothing but the mighty power of God could have maintained Elijah in his extraordinary position on mount Carmel. "He was a man of like passions with us;" and being the only one of his day who possessed sufficient moral courage and spiritual power to make a public stand for God against the power of idolatry, the enemy might readily suggest to his poor heart, "What a great man you are to stand forth thus as the solitary champion of Israel's ancient faith!" But God held up His dear servant so far. He carried him through this very trying scene, because he was His witness, and His servant.

And so it will ever be. The Lord will ever stand by those that stand by Him. Had Obadiah only made a stand against Ahab and Jezebel, the Lord would have owned him and carried him through, so that instead of being the servant of Ahab, he might have been the yokefellow of Elijah in his great reformation. But this was not the case, and therefore, like Lot of old, "his righteous soul was vexed" by the errors and evils of an idolatrous house.

O dear Christian reader, let us aim at something beyond this! Let us not be chained down to earth by deliberate connection with this world's systems or plans. Heaven is our home; there, too, our hope is; we are not of the world; Jesus has purchased us, and delivered us from it, in order that we might shine as lights and walk as heavenly men while passing onward to our heavenly rest.

However, it was not merely in his deportment and manner that Elijah acquitted himself as a servant of God; he also showed himself to be one taught of God in reference to those principles on which the needed reformation should be based. Personal deportment and manner would avail but little if soundness in the faith were lacking. It would be an easy thing to put on a leathern girdle, and assume a solemn and dignified manner; but nothing save a spiritual apprehension of divine principles will enable any one to exert a reforming influence on the men of his age.

But Elijah possessed all those needed qualifications. Both his appearance and his faith were such as, in an eminent degree, suited a thorough reformer. Conscious, therefore, that he was in possession of a secret which would deliver the spirits of his brethren from the unhallowed thralldom of Baal, he says to Ahab, "Now, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table."

He is determined to bring Baal and the God of Israel face to face, in the view of the nation. He felt that matters should be brought to a test. His brethren must no longer be left to "halt between two opinions." What strength there is in the prophet's words as he stands before the assembled thousands of Israel! "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

This was very simple. The prophets of Baal could not gainsay nor resist it. The prophet only asked for decision of character. There could be nothing gained on either side by vacillating ways. "I would ye were either cold or hot." We know from the Lord's own words to Elijah, in the next chapter, that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and who, we may suppose,

were only waiting for some vigorous hand to plant the standard of truth in order that they might rally round it. No one amongst them would seem to have had power for such a bold step, but they would no doubt rejoice in Elijah's boldness and ability to do so.

This has often been the case in the history of the people of God. In times of greatest darkness there have always been those whose spirits mourned in secret over the widespread evil and apostasy, who longed for the bursting in of spiritual light, and were ready with joy to welcome its earliest beams. God has never left Himself without a witness; and although it is only here and there we can perceive a star of sufficient magnitude and brilliancy to pierce through the clouds of night and enlighten the benighted Church in the wilderness, yet we know, blessed be God, that let the clouds be ever so dark and gloomy, the stars have been there in every age, though their twinkling has been but little seen.

Thus it was in the days of Elias; there were seven thousand such stars whose light was obscured by the thick clouds of idolatry — who would not yield to the darkness themselves, though they lacked power to enlighten others; yet was there but one star of sufficient power and brightness to dispel the mists and create a sphere in which others might shine. This was Elijah the Tishbite, whom we now behold, in heavenly power and light, breaking into the very stronghold of Baal, upsetting Jezebel's table, [False religion has always sought the sunshine of this world's favour, whereas true religion has always been more pure and genuine when the world has frowned upon it. "*The prophets of the groves eat at Jezebel's table.*" If Jezebel had had no table, she would have had no prophets either; it was *her table*, and not *her souls*, they sought.] writing folly upon the whole system of Baal's worship, and in fact, by God's grace, effecting a mighty moral change in the nation — bringing the many thousands of Israel down into the dust in real self-abasement, and mingling the blood of Baal's prophets with the waters of Kishon.

How gracious of the Lord to raise up such a deliverer for His deluded people! And what a death-blow to the prophets of Baal! We may safely assert they never offered a more unwilling sacrifice to their idol than that which our prophet suggested. It was the sure precursor of his downfall, and of theirs also. What a sad aspect they

present, “crying and cutting themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out,” and crying out, with unavailing earnestness, “O Baal, hear us!” Alas, Baal could not hear nor answer them!

The true prophet, conscious in his inmost soul of the sinful folly of the whole scene, mocks them: they cry more earnestly, and leap with frantic zeal upon the altar; but all in vain. They were now to be unmasked in the view of the nation. Their craft was in imminent danger. Those hands which, through their influence, had so often been lifted up in the diabolical worship of a sinful absurdity, were speedily about to seize them and drag them to their merited fate. Well, therefore, might they cry, “O Baal, hear us!”

How solemn, how immutably true, are those words of Jeremiah, “Cursed is the man whose heart departeth from the Lord”! It matters not on whom, or on what, we place our confidence: whether it be a religious system or a religious ordinance, or anything else, it is a departure of the heart from God — a curse follows it, and when the final struggle comes the Baal will be invoked in vain; “there will be neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard.”

How awful is the thought of departure from the living God! How dreadful to find, at the end of our history, that we have been leaning upon a broken reed! O, if you have not found solid and abiding peace for your guilty conscience in the atoning blood of Jesus, if you have a single emotion of fear in your heart at the thought of meeting God, let me put the prophet's question to you, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” Why do you stand aloof when Jesus calls you to come unto Him and take His yoke upon you? Believe me, the hour is coming when, if you have not fled for refuge to Jesus, a greater than Elijah will mock at your calamity.

Harken to these solemn words: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you” (Prov. 1: 24-27).

Awful words! inconceivably awful! How much more awful the reality! Flee to Jesus. Betake yourself to the open fountain, and there find peace and refuge ere the storm of divine wrath and judgement bursts upon your head. "When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door," you are lost, and lost forever. Oh think of this, I implore of you, and let not Satan drag your precious soul into everlasting perdition!

We now turn to another side of the picture. The prophets of Baal were signally defeated. They had leaped, cut themselves, and cried to no purpose. Their whole system had been proved a gross fallacy; the superstructure of error had been trampled to the ground, and it only now remained to rear the magnificent superstructure of truth in the view of those who had been so long enslaved by vanity and lies. "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. *And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.* And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord."

It is always well to wait patiently, and allow evil and error to find their own level. Time will surely bring the truth to light; and let error array itself ever so carefully in the venerable robes of antiquity, yet will time strip it of these robes, and display it in all its naked deformity. Elijah felt this, and therefore he could stand quietly by and allow all the sands of Baal's glass to run out ere he began to exhibit the pattern of a more excellent way. Now it needs a very real apprehension of divine principles to enable one to adopt this patient course. Had our prophet been shallow-minded, or badly taught, he would have been in much greater haste to display his system and raise a storm of opposition against his antagonists.

But a spirit gifted with true elevation is never in haste, never perturbed; he has found a centre round which to move, and in revolving round that he finds himself carried out of the region of every other influence. Such an one was Elijah, a really elevated, independent, holy man — one who in every scene of his extraordinary career maintained a heavenly dignity which is earnestly to be sought after by all the Lord's servants. When he

stood on mount Carmel, beholding the fruitless bodily exercise of Baal's prophets, he presented the appearance of one who was fully conscious of his heavenly mission; and not only in his manner, but also in his principles of acting, he acquitted himself as a prophet of the Lord.

What, then, were those principles on which Elijah acted? They were, in a word, those on which the unity of the nation was based. The first thing he does is to “repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down.” This was Israel's centre, and to this every true reformer directed his attention. Those who seek to carry out a one-sided reformation may rest satisfied with merely throwing down that which is false, without proceeding further to establish a sound basis on which to erect a new superstructure: but such reformation will never stand; it will carry with it too much of the old leaven to admit of its being a testimony. The altar of Baal must not only be thrown down, but the altar of the Lord must be set up.

Some there are who would sacrifice to the Lord on the altar of Baal; in other words, they would retain an evil system, and rest satisfied with giving it a right name. But no; the only centre of unity which God can recognize is the name of Jesus — simply and exclusively that. The people of God must not be looked at as members of a system, but as members of Christ. God sees them as such, and it should be their business to reckon themselves to be what God tells them they are, and manifestly to take that blessed place.

And we may further remark that Elijah in his actings on mount Carmel does not stop short of the recognition of Israel's unbroken unity. He takes *twelve stones*, according to the number of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the Word of the Lord came, saying “*Israel* shall be thy name.” This was taking high ground — yea, the very highest. Solomon could have taken no higher. To recognize the twelve tribes of Israel at a time when they were divided, and weakened, and degraded, evidenced true communion with the mind of God in reference to His people.

Yet this is what the Spirit will ever suggest. “Our twelve tribes” must never be given up. True they may, through their own weakness and folly, become scattered and divided; yet the God of

Israel can only think of them in that unbroken unity which they once exhibited, and which, moreover, they will exhibit again when, having been united by the true David, they shall in holy fellowship tread the courts of the Lord forever.

Now the Prophet Elijah, through the Spirit, saw all this. With the eye of faith, he penetrated the long, dreary time of Israel's humiliating bondage, and beheld them in their visible unity, no longer Judah and Israel, but *Israel*, for the word is, "*Israel shall be thy name.*" His mind was occupied, not with what Israel was, but with what God had said. This was faith. Unbelief might say, "You are taking too high a stand; it is presumption to talk about twelve tribes when there are but ten; it is folly to speak of unbroken unity when there is nothing but division." Such will ever be the language of unbelief, which can never grasp the thoughts of God, nor see things as He sees them.

But it is the happy privilege of the man of faith to rest his spirit on the immutable testimony of God, which is not to be nullified by man's sinful folly. "*Israel shall be thy name.*" "Precious promise! Most precious! Most permanent! Nothing could for a moment interfere with it — neither Rehoboam's childishness nor Jeroboam's cunning policy; no, nor yet Ahab's vileness could hinder Elijah from taking the loftiest position that an Israelite could take, even the position of a worshiper at an altar built of twelve stones, according to the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now in Elijah the Tishbite we have an example of the power of faith in the promise of God at a time when everything around him seemed to stand opposed. It enabled him to rise above all the evil and sorrow around him, and to build an altar of twelve stones with as much holy confidence and unclouded assurance as did Joshua when, amid the triumphant hosts of Israel, he erected his trophy on the banks of Jordan.

But I must bring this section to a close, having already extended it further than I had intended. We have seen the principle upon which our prophet desired to carry out the reformation. It was a sound one, and God honoured it. The fire from Heaven at once confounded the prophets of Baal, confirmed the prophet's faith, and

delivered the people from their sad condition of halting between two opinions. Elijah's faith had given God room to act; he had made a trench and filled it with water; in other words, he had made the difficulty as great as possible in order that the divine triumph might be complete: and truly it was so.

God will always respond to the appeal of simple faith. "Hear me," said the prophet, "O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again."

This is intelligent prayer. The prophet is engaged solely about God and His people. He does not say, "Hear me, that this people may know that I am a true prophet." No; his only object was to bring the people back to the God of their fathers, and to have the claims of God established in their consciences, in opposition to the claims of Baal. And God darkened and heard; for no sooner had he concluded his prayer than "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God."

Truth triumphs! The prophets are confounded! The prophet, in holy indignation, mingles their blood with the waters of the Kishon, and thus, evil being judged, there remains no further hindrance to the communication of the divine blessing, which Elijah announces to Ahab in these words, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." How do these words convey to us Ahab's true character! "*Eat and drink.*" This was all he knew, or cared to know. He had come forth to look for grass, and nothing more; and the prophet conveyed to him that intelligence which he knew he desired. He could not ask him to come and join him in thanksgiving to God for this glorious triumph over evil, for he knew well he would meet with no response.

And yet they were both Israelites: but one was in communion with God, and the other was the slave of sin; hence, while Ahab found his enjoyment in getting up to "eat and drink," Elijah sought his in retirement with God. Blessed, holy, heavenly enjoyment!

But mark the difference between Elijah's bearing in the presence of man and in the presence of God. He had met Obadiah, a saint in wrong circumstances, with an air of dignity and elevation; he had met Ahab in righteous sternness; he had stood amid the thousands of his deluded and erring brethren with the firmness and grace of a true reformer; and lastly, he had met the wicked prophets of Baal with mocking, and then with the sword of vengeance. Thus had he carried himself in the presence of man.

But how did he meet God? "He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." Thus he carried himself before God. All this is lovely. Our prophet knew his place both before God and man. In the presence of man he acted in the wisdom of the Spirit, as the case demanded; in the presence of God he prostrated himself in unfeigned and reverent humility. Thus may all the Lord's servants know how to walk in all their complicated relations here below.

We must now accompany our prophet to widely different scenes.

Part 5 - THE PROPHET ON MOUNT HOREB

There are few who have taken a prominent place in the history of the Church of God whose course has not been marked, in a special manner, by vicissitude: of such, as of "those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters," it may be said, "They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble." They are sometimes seen on the mount, sometimes in the valley; at one time basking in the sunshine, at another beaten by the storm.

Nor is this the case merely with prominent characters; almost every Christian, be his path ever so retired and noiseless, knows something of this vicissitude. Indeed, it would seem as if no one could run the race which is marked out for the man of faith without finding inequalities in his way. The path through the desert must be rough, and it is well that is so; for there is no right-minded person who would not rather be set in a rough than in a "slippery" way. The Lord sees our need of being exercised by roughness and hardness,

not only that we may find the rest at the end sweeter, but also that we may be the more effectually trained and fitted for the place we are yet to occupy.

True we shall have no need for trials in the kingdom, but we shall have need of those graces and habits of soul which were formed amid the trials and sorrows of the wilderness. We shall yet be constrained to acknowledge that our path here below was not a whit too rough, but that on the contrary we could not have done without a single exercise of all those that had fallen to our lot. We now see things indistinctly, and are often unable to see the needs-be for many of our trials and sorrows: moreover our impatient nature may often feel disposed to murmur and rebel; but only let us be patient and we shall be able without hesitation, and with the full assent of every thought and feeling, to say, “He led us forth by *a right way*, that He might bring us to a city of habitation. “

The above train of thought is suggested by the circumstances of our prophet in 1 Kings 19. He seems to have had little anticipation of the terrific storm which was about to burst upon him: he had come from the top of mount Carmel, and in the energy of the Spirit outstripped Ahab in his chariot to the entrance of Jezreel; but there he was destined to receive a check, and that, too, from one who had hitherto kept herself in the background. This was the wicked Jezebel. I say, she had kept herself in the background; but she had not been idle there. She had no doubt influenced her weak-minded lord, and used his power for her wicked ends. She had opened her house and spread a table for the prophets of Baal. These things she had done in furtherance of her master's interests.

Jezebel is not to be looked at merely as an individual: she stands before the spiritual mind as the representative of a class — yea, more, as the impersonation of a principle which has from age to age been working in hostility to the truth of God, and which appears in its full maturity in the person of the great whore spoken of in the Apocalypse. The spirit of Jezebel is a persecuting spirit — a spirit that will carry its own point in opposition to everything — an active, energetic, persevering spirit, in which satanic vigour appears very manifestly.

Very different is the Ahab spirit. In Ahab we see one who, provided he could attain the gratification of his carnal and worldly desires, cared but little about religion. He troubled himself but little to decide between the claims of Jehovah and those of Baal. To him they were all alike. Now it was such an one that Jezebel could wield according to her mind. She took care to have his desires gratified while she actively and sagaciously used his power in opposition to the truth of God. The Ahabs are always found to be fit instruments for the Jezebels; hence, in the Apocalypse, where all those principles which have been, are now, or are yet to be, at work, are seen in their full maturity, we find the woman riding the beast: that is, corrupt religion wielding the secular power, or the full-grown Jezebel-spirit making use of the full-grown Ahab-spirit.

All this has a solemn voice for the present generation; and those that have ears to hear, let them hear. Men are becoming increasingly heedless as to the interests and destinies of the truth of God in the earth. Christ and Belial are all alike, provided the wheels of the vast machine of utilitarianism be not clogged in their movement. You may hold what principles you please provided you hold them in the background; and thus men of the most conflicting principles can unite and hold those principles in abeyance while with ardour and energy they pursue the phantom of worldliness.

Such is the spirit and tendency of the age, and all that is needed is that a Jezebel-spirit should arise and lead men on along the path upon which they have manifestly entered — a path which will most assuredly end in the blackness of darkness forever. Solemn, most solemn thought! Again I say, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

But we have said it was from Jezebel that the prophet Elijah received the check which seems so to have overwhelmed his spirit. “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.” Observe, “Ahab told Jezebel”; he had neither sufficient interest in the matter to lead him to take an active part himself, nor, even if he had the interest, did he possess sufficient energy. To him, perhaps, the abundance of rain seemed to stand connected with the death of the prophets, and therefore he could quietly stand by and see them put to death.

What was Baal to him, or Jehovah either? Nothing. Let Ahab and all of that school get enough to “eat and drink,” and all questions of truth and religion will be but lightly regarded. Gross and unmeaning abomination! Miserable, infatuated sensualism! Ye children of this world, whose sentiments are expressed in the words “let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” think of Ahab; remember his terrible end — the end of his eating and drinking. What was it? “The dogs licked his blood.” And as to his soul — ah, eternity will unfold its destinies!

But in Jezebel we see one who lacked neither interest nor energy. To her the controversy was one of the deepest moment, and she was determined to act with decision. “Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.”

Here then the prophet was called to endure the storm of persecution. He had been on mount Carmel, where he had stood against all the prophets of Baal; his course had hitherto been a triumphant one, the result of communion with God; but now his sun seemed, in his view, to be about to go down, and his horizon to become dark and gloomy.

“And when he saw that, he arose and *went for his life*, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.”

Elijah's spirit sinks altogether; he looks at everything through the dark cloud in which he was enveloped; all his labour seems, in his view, to have been for nought and in vain, and he has only to lie down and die. His spirit, harassed by what he deemed fruitless efforts to bring the nation back to its faith, longed to enter into rest.

Now, in all this we perceive the workings of impatience and unbelief. Elijah said nothing about longing to depart when he stood on mount Carmel. No; there all was triumph; there he seemed to be

achieving something — he seemed to be of some use, and therefore he thought not of his departure. But the Lord would show His servant not only what he “must do,” but also what he “must suffer.” The former we like well enough, the latter we are not so well prepared for. And yet the Lord is as much glorified in a patient sufferer as in an active servant. The graces that are developed by one who is enabled to endure protracted suffering are as fragrant in their perfume as all the fruits of active service. This our prophet should have borne in mind. But ah, the heart can well understand and sympathise with him in his gloom and despondency.

There are few of the Lord's servants who have not, at some time or other, eagerly desired to put off their harness and cease from the toils of conflict, particularly at times when all their labour and testimony would seem to be in vain, and when they are disposed to look upon themselves as mere cumberers of the ground. Yet we must wait God's time, and until then seek to pursue our way in patient, uncomplaining service. There is a vast difference between longing to get away from trial and sorrow, and longing to be at home in our Father's house.

No doubt the thought of rest is sweet, ineffably sweet, to the labouring man. It is sweet to think of the time when our own gracious God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, sweet to think of those green pastures and living fountains to which the Lamb will lead His flock throughout the coming ages of glory. In a word, the whole prospect presented to the view of faith is sweet and cheering; yet we have no right to say, “O Lord, take away my life.” Nothing but an impatient spirit could ever dictate such language.

How different is the spirit breathed in the following words of the apostle Paul! “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is *far better*. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is *more needful for you*. And having this confidence, I know that I *shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith*” (Phil. 1: 23-25).

These words exhibit a truly Christian spirit. The servant of the Church should seek the Church's good, and not his own advantage. If Paul had considered himself, he would not have tarried a moment

on earth; but when he considered the Church, he desired to abide and continue for the purpose of furthering its joy and faith. This should have been Elijah's desire too: he should have desired to remain for the benefit of the nation. But here he failed. He had fled into the wilderness under the influence of unbelief, and for the purpose of saving his life, and then desired that his life might be taken away simply to escape from the trials which his position involved.

In all this we may learn a most profitable lesson. Unbelief is sure to drive us from the place of testimony and service. So long as Elijah walked by faith, so long he occupied the place of a servant and a witness; but the moment his faith gave way, he abandoned both and fled into the wilderness. Unbelief ever unfits us for the place of service, and renders us useless. We never can act for God save in the energy of faith. We should remember this at a time like the present, when so many are giving up and turning aside. I suppose we may lay it down as a fixed principle of truth, that whenever a man abandons any distinctive position of testimony, it is from positive unbelief in the truth which led him into it.

Thus, for example, at the present day we see many who at one time took up a very distinct and prominent position from having learnt (as they stated) that great truth, the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church. Now, when this truth is really learnt, and held in power, it delivers from man's authority in matters of faith, and leads Christians out of those systems where such authority is acknowledged and defended.

If the Holy Ghost rules in the Church, then man has no right to interfere, no right to decree and institute ceremonies; for in doing so he is most presumptuously interfering with the divine prerogative. If therefore a man sincerely believe this important truth, his belief will certainly influence his conduct so far that he will feel himself called upon to bear testimony against every system in which this truth is practically denied; by separating from it.

It is not a question of what or whom he will attach himself to. No; this is another, and an after, consideration. A man's first business is to "cease to do evil," and after that to "learn to do well."

However, many who once professed to see this truth, and to act upon it, have since lost confidence in it, and as a consequence have retired from their distinct position, and gone back to those systems from which they had emerged. Like Elijah, they have not realized all their expectations; the results which they looked for have not appeared, therefore they have fled from the scene, and doubtless many have felt disposed to say, "*It is enough.*"

Yes, many a heart which once cherished high and fond expectations respecting the Church is now bowed down with sorrow and disappointment. Those who professed to see and act upon the truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and other collateral truths, have, to say the least, failed to carry them into practice, and not only failed, but in many instances have made a most humiliating exhibition of themselves; and the enemy has not been backward in making his own use of all this. He has used it especially to discourage the hearts of those who, no doubt, desired to stand in testimony for Christ, but who, seeing the failure of everything like corporate testimony on the earth, have given up in despair.

However, let Christians observe this: it was unbelief that made Elijah fly into the wilderness, and it is unbelief which causes any one to give up that position of testimony into which the truth of the Holy Ghost's presence in the Church would necessarily lead him.

Those who thus retreat prove that it was not with God and His eternal truth, but with man and his circumstances, that they had to do. If God's truth be the basis of our acting, we shall not be affected by man's mutability and failure. Man may, and assuredly will, fail in his very best and purest efforts to carry out the truth of God; but shall man's failure make the truth of God of none effect? "God forbid; yea, let God be true and every man a liar."

If those who profess to hold the blessed doctrine of the unity of the Church should split into parties; if those who hold the doctrine of the Spirit's presence in the Church for the purpose of rule and ministry should nevertheless practically lean upon man's authority; if those who profess to be looking for the personal appearance and reign of the Son of man should be found grasping

with eagerness after the things of this present world, shall these things nullify those heavenly principles? Certainly not. Thank God, truth will be truth to the end. God will be God, though man should prove himself a thousandfold more imperfect than he is. Wherefore, instead of giving up in despair because men have failed to make a right use of God's truth, we should rather hold fast that truth as the only stay of our souls amid universal ruin and shipwreck.

Had Elijah held fast the truth which filled his soul when he stood on mount Carmel, he would never have been found beneath the juniper tree, nor would he have given utterance to such words as "Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

Yet the Lord can graciously meet his poor servant even asleep under a juniper tree. "He knoweth our frame, He remembers that we are dust," and therefore, instead of granting the petulant request of His harassed and disappointed servant, He rather seeks to feed and strengthen him for further exertion. This is not "the manner of man," but it is, blessed forever be His name, the manner of God, whose ways and thoughts are not as ours. Man would often deal roughly and harshly with his fellow, making no allowance for him, but acting towards him in haste and severity. Not so God. He ever deals in the deepest pity and tenderness. He understood Elijah, and He remembered the stand he had recently made for His name and truth, and therefore He would minister to him in the season of his depression.

"And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God" (1 Kings 19: 5, 8).

The Lord knows better than we do the demands that may be made on us, and He graciously strengthens us according to His estimate of those demands. The prophet wished to sleep for sorrow,

but the Lord wished to strengthen and nerve him for future service. Like the disciples in the garden, who, overwhelmed with deep sorrow at the apparent failure of all their fondly cherished hopes, allowed themselves to sink into profound slumber while their blessed Master would have had them girding up their loins and nerving their arms for the trying scenes on which they were about to enter.

But Elijah did eat and drink; and being thus strengthened, he proceeded to mount Horeb. Here again we have to trace the sorrowful actings of an impatient spirit. Elijah seems determined to retire from his place of service and testimony altogether. If he cannot sleep under the juniper tree, he will hide himself in a cave. "He came thither unto a cave, and lodged there."

When once a man allows himself to slip aside from the position in which faith would keep him, there is no accounting for the extremes into which he may run. Nothing but abiding faith in the Word of God can maintain any one in the path of service, because *faith makes a man satisfied to wait for the end*, whereas unbelief, looking only at surrounding circumstances, sinks into complete despondency.

The Christian must make up his mind to meet with nothing but trial and disappointment here. We may often dream of rest and satisfaction in some condition or other here; but it is only a dream. Elijah had no doubt hoped to see a mighty moral change brought about by his instrumentality; and instead of that, his life was threatened. But he ought to have been prepared for this.

The man who had fearlessly faced Ahab and all the prophets of Baal ought surely to have been able to bear a message from a woman. Yet no; his faith had given way. When a man's faith gives way, his own shadow will deter him. In contemplating the prophet's position on mount Horeb, one is disposed to ask, Can it be the same man whom we saw so recently standing on mount Carmel, at an altar of twelve stones, and there so blessedly vindicating the God of Israel in the presence of his brethren?

Alas! what a powerless creature man is when not sustained by simple faith in the testimony of God! David could, at one time, meet Goliath in the power of faith, and afterwards say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Faith gets above circumstances and looks at God; unbelief loses sight of God, and looks only at circumstances. Unbelief says, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight;" faith says, "We are well able to overcome them."

However, the Lord does not leave His servant in the cave; He still follows him, and seeks to bring him again and again back to that post which he had abandoned in his impatience and unbelief. "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" What a reproof! Why did Elijah thus bury himself in a cave? Why had he retreated from the honourable post of testimony? Because of Jezebel's message, and because his ministry had not been as fully owned as he expected. He thought to have reaped a more cheering harvest from all his labour than a threatening message and apparent desertion, and therefore he had sought the retirement of a mountain cave, as a place suited to indulge his feelings.

Now, it must be admitted that there was much — very much to wound the prophet's spirit; he had come from his quiet retreat at Zarephath to face the whole nation, headed by Jezebel and a host of wicked priests and prophets. He had confounded the latter, through God's grace; God had sent down fire from Heaven in answer to his prayer; all Israel had seemed to acknowledge the truth as proclaimed by him. All these things must have raised his expectations to no ordinary height; yet, after all, his life is threatened, he sees no one to stand by him, he is enveloped in a thick cloud, he abandons the field of conflict, and hides himself in a cave.

It is much easier to censure another than to act aright, and we must be exceedingly slow in pronouncing judgement upon the actions of so honoured a servant as Elijah the Tishbite. But though we should not deal much in censure, we may, at least, draw instruction and warning from this section of our prophet's history. We may learn a lesson of which we stand very much in need. "What doest thou here?" is a question which might justly be put to many of

us from time to time, when, in impatience or unbelief, we leave our proper place of service amongst our brethren, to sleep under a juniper tree, or hide ourselves in a cave.

Are there not many at this moment who, aforesaid, were powerful advocates of the principles connected with the unity and worship of the people of God, to be found either asleep or hidden in caves? that is, they are doing nothing for the furtherance of those truths which they once advocated. This is a truly sorrowful reflection. To such the question, "What doest thou here?" should come with special force. Yes, what are such doing? or rather, what are they not doing in the way of positive mischief to the sheep of Christ? A man who thus retires is not merely harmless, he is noxious; he is really injuring his brethren.

It would be far better never to have appeared as the advocates of important truth, than having done so to retire; to call special attention to some leading principles of divine truth, and then to abandon them, is most culpable. "If many man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." We can pity ignorance, or endeavour to instruct it; but the man, who, having professed to see truth, afterwards abandons it, can neither be looked upon as an object of pity, nor a subject for instruction.

But it is not merely unbelief and disappointment in reference to certain truths that drive men into unhappy isolation; apparent failure in ministry has the same effect. The latter was, perhaps, what more especially affected Elijah. The triumph on mount Carmel had, doubtless, led to much elation of spirit in reference to the results of his ministry, and he was not prepared for the sad reverse.

Now, the sovereign remedy for both these maladies, that is, for unbelief in important truth and disappointment as regards our ministry, is to keep the eye simply and steadily fixed on Jesus.

If, for example, we see men professing those two grand and all-important truths — the unity of the Church, and the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church — professing, I say, to see these things, and yet failing most sadly in carrying them out, shall we turn aside, and say there is no unity, and no abiding presence of

the Holy Ghost? God forbid. This would be to make God's truth dependent upon man's faithfulness, which cannot be endured for a moment by the spiritual mind. No, let us rather look into the precious Word of God, and see the Church as the body of Christ, each member thereof written in God's book from everlasting to everlasting.

And, in like manner when we see Jesus at God's right hand in the Heavens, we see the unfailing ground of the Spirit's presence in the Church. Thank God for the blessed stability of all this. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Finally, if any be tried in the matter of their ministry, if the enemy would endeavour to make them give up in chagrin or disappointment, let them try to keep their eyes more simply on Jesus, remembering that, however depressing the aspect of things here may be, the time is speedily approaching when all who have served the Lord simply, from love to Him, shall reap a full reward. We must take care, however, that we allow not our ministry, or the fruits thereof, to get between our souls and Christ. There is great danger of this. A man may set out in unaffected devotedness to his Master, and yet, through the craft of the enemy, and the weakness of his own heart, he may, ere long, give his work a more prominent place in his thoughts than Christ Himself. Had Elijah kept the God of Israel more before him, he would not have given up in despair.

But we learn the real state of the prophet's soul from his reply to the divine challenge: "I have been very jealous," said he, "for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." How different is this language from that which dropped from his lips on mount Carmel! There he vindicated God, — here he vindicates himself; there he endeavoured to convert his brethren by presenting before them the truth of God, — here he accuses his brethren, and recounts their sins before God.

[It is instructive to observe the order in which Elijah recounts the sins of Israel: 1 — "they have forsaken Thy covenant;" 2 — "they have thrown down Thine altars;" 3 — "they have slain Thy

prophets with the sword,” The ground of all this evil was their having forsaken the covenant of God, the natural consequence of which was the throwing down of God's altars, and the abandonment of His worship, which latter was followed out by killing the prophets. We can understand this order.]

“I have been very jealous;” but “they have forsaken,” etc. This was the strain in which the disappointed prophet spoke from his cave on mount Horeb. He seems to have looked upon himself as the only one that had done, or was doing, anything for God. “I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.” Now all this was the natural consequence of his position.

The moment a man retires from his place of testimony and service among his brethren, he must begin to extol himself, and accuse them; yea, his very act expresses at once the assumption of his faithfulness, and their failure. But to all who thus separate from, and accuse their brethren, the searching question is, “What doest thou here?” “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Our prophet, however, is called forth from his isolated place. “Go forth,” said Jehovah, “and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a *still small voice*.”

The Lord, by these solemn and varied exhibitions of Himself and His wondrous actings, would teach His servant most impressively that He was not to be confined to one agent in carrying out His designs. The wind was an agent, and a powerful one, yet it did not accomplish the end; and the same might be said of the earthquake and the fire. They, by their very terribleness, served but to pave the way for the last, and apparently the weakest agent, namely, the still small voice.

Thus the prophet was taught that he must be satisfied to be an agent, and one of many. He might have thought that all the work

was to have been done by him. Coming, as he did, with all the terrible vehemence of the mighty wind, he supposed he should have carried off every obstacle, and brought the nation back to its place of happy allegiance to God. But ah! how little does even the most elevated instrument apprehend his own insignificance! The most devoted, the most gifted and the most elevated are but stones in the superstructure, screws in the vast machine; and whoever supposes he is *the* instrument, will find himself much mistaken.

“Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.” And so Elijah had to learn that the Lord was not confined to him. He had other shafts in His quiver, which He would discharge in due time. The wind, the earthquake, and the fire must all do their work, and then the still small voice could be heard distinctly and effectually. It is the sole province of God to make Himself heard, even though He speak in “a still small voice.” Elijah remained in the cave until this voice reached his ear, and then “he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.”

It is only “before the Lord” that we get into our right position. We may conceive high thoughts of ourselves and our ministry, until we are brought into the divine presence, and then we learn to wrap our face in a mantle; in other words, we learn, in reality, to hide ourselves. When Moses found himself in the divine presence “he trembled, and durst not behold.” When Job found himself there, “he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes”; and so has it been with every one who has ever gotten a view of himself in the light of God's presence; he has learned his own thorough nothingness, he has been led to see that God could do without him.

The Lord is ever ready to acknowledge the smallest act of service done to Him, but the moment a man makes a centre of his service, the Lord will teach him that He wants him no longer. Thus it was with Elijah. He had retired from the field of labour and conflict, and earnestly desired to be gone: he thought himself a solitary witness, a forsaken and disappointed servant, and Jehovah makes him stand forth before Him, and there, as it were, give up his commission, and hear the names of his successors in the field of labour.

“The Lord said unto him, Go, return, on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

This statement must have thrown much light on the prophet's mind. Seven thousand! although he had thought himself left alone. Jehovah will never be at a loss for instruments. If the wind will not do, He has the earthquake; and if the earthquake will not do, He has the fire; and last of all, He has “the still small voice.”

And so Elijah was taught that Israel had to be acted upon by other ministry besides his: Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha had yet to appear on the scene, and as the still small voice had proved effectual in drawing him forth from his mountain cave, so would the gracious ministry of Elisha prove effectual in drawing forth from their lurking-places the thousands of faithful ones whom he had altogether overlooked. Elijah was not to do all. He was but one agent. “The eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”

Such, I believe, was the important lesson taught to our prophet by the impressive scenes on mount Horeb. He had gone up thither full of thoughts of himself alone; he stood there filled with the idea that he was *the* witness, the *only* witness; he went down from thence with the humbling yet wholesome consciousness that *he was but one of seven thousand*. A very different view of the case indeed. None can teach like God. When He desires to teach a lesson He can teach it effectually, blessed be His name. He had so taught Elijah his own insignificance that he was satisfied to retrace his steps, to come forth from his cave and down from the mount, to lay aside all his complaints and accusations, and humbly, silently, obediently, and willingly cast his prophetic mantle over the shoulders of another.

All this is most instructive. The silence of Elijah, after he hears of the seven thousand is most remarkable. He had learnt a lesson which mount Carmel could not teach him — a lesson which neither Zarephath nor Cherith had taught him. In these places he had learnt much about God and His truth, but on Horeb he had learnt his own littleness, and as the result of that learning he comes down from the mount and gives up his office to another; and not merely this, but in so doing he says “What have I done?”

In a word, we see in this dear servant the most complete renunciation of self from the moment he learnt that he was but one of many. He delivers a message to Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth; a message to Ahaziah in his sick chamber; then he takes his departure from earth, leaving the work which he had begun to be finished by other hands. Like John the Baptist, who, as we know, came in the spirit and power of Elias, he was satisfied to usher in another and then retire.

Oh that we all knew more of this humble self-renouncing spirit — the spirit which leads a man to do the work and think nothing of it; or if it should be so, to see the work done by others and rejoice therein. The Baptist had to learn this as well as the Tishbite; he had to learn to be content to end his brilliant career in the gloom of a prison while another was doing the work. John too thought it strange that it should be thus with him, and sent a message to Christ to inquire, “Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?” As if he had said, Can it be possible that He to whom I have borne witness is indeed the Christ and yet I am left to perish, neglected, in Herod's dungeon?

Thus it was, and John had to learn to be content. He had said at the commencement of his ministerial course, “He must increase, but I must decrease”; but it may be he had not just counted upon such a mode of decreasing: yet such was the divine counsel concerning this honoured servant. How different are God's thoughts from those of man! John, after having fulfilled a most important mission, even the mission of ushering in the Son of God, was destined to have his head cut off at the will of a wicked woman, and lest an ungodly tyrant should break his oath.

Just so was it with Elijah the Tishbite. His course, no doubt, had been a most brilliant one; he had passed before the eyes of Israel in all the dignity and majesty of a heavenly man — a heavenly messenger. Divine truth had fallen from his lips, and God had abundantly honoured him in his work; yet the moment he began to think of himself as anything; the moment he began to say, “I have been very jealous, and I only am left.” the Lord taught him his mistake, and told him to appoint his successor.

May we learn from all this to be very humble and self-renouncing in our service, whatever it be. Let us not presume to survey ourselves as if we were anything, or our service as if we had achieved some great thing. And even though our ministry should be unproductive, and we ourselves despised and rejected, may we be able *to look forward to the end*, when everything shall be made manifest. This was what our blessed Master did. He kept His eye fixed on “the joy that was set before Him,” and regarded not the thoughts of men as He passed along. Nor did He complain of or accuse those who rejected, despised, and crucified Him. No; His dying words were, “Father, forgive them.” Blessed Master, impart unto us more of Thy meek, loving, gracious and forgiving spirit! May we be like Thee, and tread in Thy steps across this dreary world!

Part 6 - THE PROPHET'S RAPTURE

From the moment that Elijah had cast his mantle upon the shoulders of Elisha we may consider his prophetic career as almost ended. He delivered a message or two, as has already been noticed; but as regards his ministerial connection with Israel, it may be looked upon as closed from the moment that Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abelmeholah, was anointed to be prophet in his room. Indeed, he abandoned the work himself. “He arose, and fled for his life;” so that it was, to speak after the manner of men, high time to think of appointing a successor.

But we must not confine our thoughts to Elijah's ministerial character when reflecting upon his life and times. We must not only look at him as a *prophet*, but also as a *man*; not only as a *servant*, but also a *child*; not only *officially*, but also *personally*. As a

prophet, the steady continuance and successful termination of his course would depend, in a great measure, on his own faithfulness. Hence, when he allowed himself to be carried away by a spirit inconsistent with the character of a genuine servant, he had to resign his office into the hands of another.

[It may be needful just to notice an objection which may be made to the view I have taken of the prophet's actings. It may be said that he was raised up at a special era of Israel's history, and for a special purpose, and that when that purpose had been effected another kind of instrument was needed. All this is most true. Yet we can have no difficulty in perceiving the haste and impatience of Elijah in desiring to resign his post because things had not turned out as he had expected. God's counsels and man's acting are very distinct. The ministry of Elijah had filled its proper place in the nation's history, no doubt; and moreover, another kind of instrument might be needed; yet this leaves quite untouched the question of his spirit and actings in the matter. Joshua might be needed to succeed Moses; and yet it was for hastiness of spirit that Moses was refused permission to go over Jordan.]

There were, however, better things in store for Elijah. He might be hasty; he might hide himself in a cave, and from thence make intercession against Israel; he might impatiently long to depart from the trying scene in which he had been called to move; he might do all this, and in consequence thereof be called to resign his place: still the blessed God had thoughts of grace about him which never could have entered into his heart.

How truly blessed to allow God to adopt His own manner in dealing with us! We are sure to sustain loss when we interfere with the divine method of proceeding; and yet it has ever been man's tendency thus to interfere. Man will not allow God to adopt His own method of justifying him, but will ever be intruding into the wondrous plan of redemption: and even when he has submitted himself, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, to God's righteousness, he will again and again, notwithstanding repeated experience of God's superior wisdom, seek to interfere with the divine method of training and leading him; as if he could make better arrangements for himself than God! Presumptuous folly! —

the fruits of which, to some, will be eternal perdition; to others, present forfeiture of blessing in the way of enlarged knowledge and experience of God's character and ways.

Had Elijah received his request, how much he would have lost! How much better to be carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire, than to be taken away in a fit of impatience! Elijah asked for the latter, but God gave him the former. "And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal" (2 Kings 2: 1).

It would be foreign to my present design to dwell upon the circumstances of Elisha's introduction into the prophetic office, his slowness at first in accompanying Elijah, and his unwillingness afterward to leave him. We find him in this chapter accompanying Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel, and from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to Jordan. All these places were famous in Israel's history. Bethel, or the house of God, was the spot where Jacob of old had seen the mystic ladder stretching from earth to Heaven, the apt expression of God's future purposes concerning the heavenly and earthly families. To this same place did Jacob return, by the express command of God, after he had cleansed himself from the defilement of Shechem (Gen. 35: 1).

Bethel, therefore, was a spot of deep interest to the heart of an Israelite. But alas, it had become polluted! Jeroboam's calf had effectually obliterated the sacred principles of truth taught by Jacob's ladder. The latter conducted the spirit from earth to Heaven — it led upward and onward; upward to God's eternal purpose of *grace*; onward to the display of that purpose in *glory*. The former, on the contrary, bound the heart down to a degrading system of political religion — a system in which the *names* of things heavenly were used to secure for self the things earthly.

Jeroboam made use of *the house of God* to secure for himself *the kingdom of Israel*. He was well content to remain at the bottom of the ladder, and cared not to look upward. His earthly heart desired not to scale those sublime heights to which Jacob's ladder led — earth and its glory were all he wanted; and provided he obtained these, he cared not whether he worshipped before Baal's calf at

Bethel, or Jehovah's altar at Jerusalem. What was it to him? Jerusalem, Bethel, or Dan, was but a name in the estimate of this politico-religious man — yea, and in the estimate of every other such man.

Religion is but an instrument in the hands of the children of this world — an instrument by which they dig into the bowels of the earth; not a ladder by which they mount from earth to Heaven. Man pollutes everything sacred. Place in his hands the purest, the most heavenly truth, and ere long he will defile it: commit to his guardianship the most precious, the most impressive ordinance, and he will ere long convert it into a lifeless form, and lose therein the principles sought to be conveyed. So was it with Bethel. So was it with everything sacred that man had anything to do with.

Then as to Gilgal, the place from whence the two prophets started: it too was a place of interest. It was there the Lord rolled away the reproach of Egypt from His people; there Israel kept their first Passover in the land of Canaan, and were refreshed by the old corn of the land. Gilgal was the rallying point for Joshua and his men of war; from thence they went forth in the strength of the Lord to obtain glorious triumphs over the uncircumcised, and thither they returned to enjoy the spoils.

Thus was Gilgal a place round which the affections of a Jew might well entwine themselves — a place of many hallowed recollections. Yet it too had lost all its reality. The reproach of Egypt had rolled back upon Israel. the principles which once stood connected with Gilgal had lost their sway over the hearts of God's professing people. Bochim (the place of weepers) had long since taken the place of Gilgal in reference to Israel, and Gilgal had become an empty form — ancient, no doubt, but powerless, for Israel had ceased to walk in the power of the truth taught at Gilgal.

Again, as to Jericho, There it was that the hosts of the Lord, under their mighty Captain, gained their first victory in the land of promise, and exhibited the power of faith.

And lastly, at Jordan it was that Israel had had such an impressive manifestation of Jehovah's power in connection with the

ark of His presence. Jordan was the place where death had been, in type, overcome by the power of life; and in its midst, and on its banks, it presented the trophies of victory over the foe.

Thus were these varied places — namely, Bethel, Gilgal, Jericho, and Jordan — deeply interesting to the heart of a true child of Abraham; but their power and meaning were lost: Bethel had ceased to be the house of God save in name; Gilgal was no longer valued as the place where the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away. The walls of Jericho which had been destroyed by faith were built again. Jordan was no longer viewed as the scene of Jehovah's power.

In a word, all these things had become mere form without power, and the Lord might, even in Elijah's time, have to speak to the house of Israel concerning them in the following impressive words: "Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, *Seek ye Me*, and ye shall live: but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to naught. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live" (Amos 5: 4-6). Here is an important truth for all those whose hearts are prone to cling to ancient forms.

We are taught by this striking passage, that nothing but the divine reality of personal communion with God will stand. Men may plead, in defence of forms, their great antiquity, but where can we find greater antiquity than that which Bethel and Gilgal could boast? Yet they failed and came to naught, and the faithful were admonished to abandon them all and look up in simple faith to the living God.

Through all the above places, then, our prophet passed in the energy and elevation of a heavenly man. His destination lay beyond and above them all. He would seek to leave Elisha behind him while he pressed onward along his heavenward path; but the latter clings to him, and accompanies him as it were to the very portals of Heaven, and checks the busy intrusion of his less intelligent brethren by the words, "Hold ye your peace."

But Elijah moves on in the power of his heavenly mission. "The Lord hath sent me," says he; and in obedience to the divine command he passes through Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and on to Jordan; leaving far behind him all those ancient forms and sacred localities which might engage the affections of any who were not, like Elijah the Tishbite, carried forward by a heavenly hope.

The sons of the prophets might tarry amid those things, and perhaps, too, have many a hallowed recollection awakened by them; but to one whose spirit was filled with the thought of his rapture to Heaven, things of earth be they ever so sacred, ever so venerable, could present no attraction. Heaven was his object, not Bethel or Gilgal. He was about to take his departure from earth and all its harassing scenes; he was about to leave Ahab and Jezebel behind to meet their terrible doom; to pass beyond the region of broken covenants, ruined altars, and slain prophets — in a word, to pass beyond the gloom and sorrow, trial and disappointment of this stormy world; and that not by the agency of death, but by a heavenly chariot.

Death was to possess no power against this heavenly man. No doubt his body was changed in the twinkling of an eye, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption"; but death can have no power over him; he rather stepped like a conqueror into his triumphal chariot, and thus passed away into his rest.

Happy man! his conflict was over, his race run, his victory secure. He had been a stranger here — unlike the men of this world; yea, unlike many of the children of the kingdom. He had come forth from the mountains of Gilead as the girded witness, and the stern intruder upon the course of a professing world. He had no home or resting-place here below, but as a stranger and pilgrim pressed onward toward his heavenly rest.

Elijah's path from first to last was a unique one. Like John the Baptist, he was a voice "crying in the wilderness," away from the haunts of men; and whenever he did make his appearance, he was like some heavenly meteor, the origin and destiny of which were alike beyond the reach of human conception. The man with the

leathern girdle was only known as the witness against evil — the bearer of the truth of God. He had no fellowship with man as such, but in all his ways maintained an elevation which at once repulsed all intrusion and secured reverence and respect. There was so much of the sacred solemnity of the sanctuary about him that vanity or folly could not live in his presence. He was not, like his successor Elisha, a social man; his path was solitary.

“He came neither eating nor drinking.” In a word, he was peculiar in everything; peculiar in his entrance upon his prophetic career, peculiar in his passage out of it. He was an exception, and a marked one. The very fact of his not being called to pass through the gates of the grave would be quite sufficient to draw special attention to him.

But let us observe the path pursued by our prophet as he journeyed toward the scene of his rapture. He retraced the path of the camp of old. Israel had journeyed from Jordan to Jericho, but Elijah journeyed from Jericho to Jordan. In other words, as Jordan was that which separated the wilderness from the land, the prophet crossed it, thus leaving Canaan behind him. His chariot met him, not *in the Land, but in the wilderness*. The land was polluted, and was speedily to be cleansed of those who had introduced the pollution the glory was soon to take its departure from even the most favoured spot. Ichabod might be written upon it all; wherefore the prophet leaves it and passes into the wilderness, thus pointing out to the spiritual mind that nothing remained for heavenly men but the wilderness and the rest above.

Earth was no longer to be the resting-place, or portion, of the man of God it was polluted. The Jordan had been divided to allow Israel to pass from the wilderness to Canaan; it was now to be divided to allow a heavenly man to pass from Canaan to the wilderness where his chariot awaited him, ready to convey him from earth to Heaven.

Earthly things and earthly hopes had passed away from the mind of Elijah, he had learnt the thorough vanity of everything here below, and nothing now remained for him but to look beyond it all. He had toiled amid Israel's broken altars; he had laboured and

testified for years among a disobedient and gainsaying people; he had longed to depart and be at rest; and now he was about to do so in a way worthy of God — Jehovah Himself was about to place His everlasting arms around and underneath His servant to shield him from the power of death. In his case death was to have no sting and the grave no victory.

Elijah was privileged, as he stood upon the sand of the wilderness, to look right upward and, unimpeded by the humiliating circumstances of sickness and death, see Heaven open to receive him. Not one of the circumstances of fallen humanity fell to the lot of our prophet in the matter of his exit from earth. He exchanged his prophet's mantle for a chariot of fire. He could cheerfully let his mantle drop to earth while he ascended to Heaven. To him earth was but a perishable and polluted speck in God's creation, and most happy was he to lay aside everything which marked his connection with it.

What a position! And yet it is only the position which every heavenly man should occupy. Nature and earth have no longer any claims on the man who believes in Jesus. The Cross has broken all the chains which once bound him to earth. As Jordan separated Elijah from Canaan, and brought him into the wilderness to meet Jehovah's chariot, so the Cross has introduced the believer into new ground; it has brought him into purely wilderness circumstances; it has placed him, too, at the other side of death, with no other object before him than his rapture to meet the Lord in the air.

Such is the real, unquestionable portion of every saint, be he ever so weak, ever so ignorant. The happy experience thereof is, of course, a very different thing. To attain to this we need to be much alone with God, and much in the exercise of a spirit of self-judgement. Flesh and blood can never be brought to understand the rapture of a heavenly man.

Indeed, we find that the sons of the prophets did not understand it either, for they say to Elisha, "Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men: let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master, lest, peradventure, the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley."

Here was their highest thought about the prophet's rapture — “The Spirit of the Lord hath cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.” They could not conceive such a thing as his being carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire.

[It has been observed by another that the little children who came out of Bethel, and said to Elisha, “Go up, thou bald head,” were mocking the idea of rapture. If this be so, they afford a sample of the world in their thoughts about the rapture of the Church.]

They still tarried amid the things of earth, and had not their spiritual senses sufficiently exercised to perceive and appreciate a truth so glorious. Elisha yielded to their importunity, but they learnt the folly of their thoughts by the fruitless toil of their messengers. Fifty strong men could nowhere find the raptured prophet. He was gone; and it required other strength than that of nature to travel the same road. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Those who walk in the Spirit will best understand the prophet's privilege in being delivered from the claims of mortality, and being introduced in a manner so glorious into his heavenly rest.

Such, then, was the end of our prophet's course. A glorious end! Who would not say, “Let my last end be like this”? Blessed be the love that so arranged it that a *man* should be thus honoured! Blessed be the grace that led the Son of God — the Prince of life — to stoop from His glory in the heavens and submit to a shameful death upon the cross, by virtue of which, even though yet only in prospect, the prophet Elijah was exempted from the penalty of sin, permitted to pass into the regions of light and immortality without the smell of death having passed upon him!

How we should adore this love, dear Christian reader! Yes; while we trace the footsteps of the remarkable man whose history we have been dwelling upon; while we follow him from Gilead to Cherith, from Cherith to Zarephath, from Zarephath to Carmel, from Carmel to Horeb, and from Horeb to *Heaven*, we must feel constrained to cry out, “Oh, the matchless love of God!” Who could conceive that mortal man could tread such a course? Who but God could bring about such things?

The path of Elijah the Tishbite magnifies exceedingly the grace of God, and confounds the wisdom of the enemy. The rapture of a saint to Heaven is one of the richest fruits and most magnificent results of redemption. To save a soul from hell is in itself a glorious achievement, a splendid triumph; to raise up the body of a sleeping saint is even a more marked display of divine grace and power; but to take a living man, in the freshness and energy of his natural existence, and carry him from earth to Heaven, is a finer display of the power of God and the value of redemption than anything we can conceive.

Thus it was with Elijah. It was not merely the salvation of his soul, nor the resurrection of his body; but it was the rapture of his person — “body, soul, and spirit.” He was taken away from the midst of all the turmoil and confusion around him. The tide of evil might yet have to flow onward; men and principles might continue to work and show themselves. The measure of Israel's iniquities might still have to be filled up and the proud Assyrian enter the scene as the rod of Jehovah's anger to chastise them; but what was all this to the raptured prophet? Nothing. Heaven had opened upon him as he stood a homeless wanderer in the wilderness. He was now to be done with the land of Canaan, with its defilement and degradation, and to take his place above, there to await those momentous scenes in which he was, and is yet, to take a part.

Having thus seen our prophet go into Heaven, our reflections on his life and times might naturally close. Yet there is one scene in particular in which he appears in the New Testament; and did we not dwell for a little upon it, our sketch of him would be incomplete. I allude to the mount of transfiguration, where Moses and Elias appeared in glory, and spoke with the Lord Jesus Christ of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

The Lord Jesus had taken with Him Peter, James, and John, and brought them up into a high mountain, apart, in order to exhibit in their view a sample of His future glory, that thus their spirits might be fortified against the trying scenes through which both He and they had yet to pass.

What a company! The Son of God, in white and glistering raiment: Moses, type of those who sleep in Jesus; Elias, type of the raptured saints; and Peter, James, and John, who have been styled the pillars of the New Testament Church! Now it is evident that our Lord designed to prepare His apostles for the scene of His sufferings by showing them a specimen of the glory that should follow. He saw the cross, with all its accompanying horrors, in the distance before Him.

Shortly before His transfiguration He said to them, "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day": but previous to His entering into all this, He would show them something of His glory. The cross is in reality the basis of everything. The future glory of Christ and His saints, the joy of restored Israel in the land of Canaan, and the deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption, all hang upon the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. His sorrows and sufferings have secured the Church's glory, Israel's restoration, and the blessing of the whole creation.

No marvel, therefore, that the cross should form the subject of discourse between Christ and His glorious visitors. "They spoke of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." Everything hung upon this. The past, the present and the future all rested on the cross as upon an immortal basis. Moses could see and acknowledge in the cross that which superseded the law, with all its shadowy rites and ceremonies; Elijah could see and acknowledge in it that which could give efficacy to all prophetic testimony. The law and the prophets pointed to the cross as the foundation of the glory which lay beyond it.

How profoundly interesting, therefore was the subject of converse upon the mount of transfiguration, in the midst of the excellent glory! It was interesting to earth, interesting to Heaven, interesting to the wide creation of God. It forms the centre of all the divine purposes and counsels; it harmonises all the divine attributes; it secures upon immutable principles the glory of God and the sinner's peace; on it may be inscribed in indelible characters "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

No marvel, therefore, again I say, that Moses and Elias could appear in glory and talk of such a momentous subject. They were about to return to their rest, while their blessed Master had to descend again into the arena of conflict to meet the cross in all its tremendous reality; but they knew full well that He and they would yet meet in the midst of a glory which shall never be overshadowed by a cloud — a glory of which He, the Lamb, was to be the source and the centre forever — a glory which shall shine with everlasting brilliancy when all human and earthly glories shall be overcast by the shadows of an eternal night.

But what of the disciples during all this wondrous converse? How were they employed? They were asleep! Asleep while Moses and Elias conversed with the Son of God concerning His cross and passion! Marvellous insensibility! Nature can sleep in the very presence of the excellent glory.

[At is not a little remarkable that we find these same disciples asleep during the season of our Lord's agony in the garden. They slept In the view of the glory, and also in the view of the cross. Nature can as little enter into the one as the other. And yet the blessed Master does not rebuke them in either case, save to say to the most prominent and self-confident among them, "Couldst *thou* not watch with Me one hour?" He knew whom He had to do with: He knew that "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak " Gracious Master, Thou wast ever ready to make allowance for Thy poor people, and didst say, "Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptation," to those who had slept on the mount, slept in the garden, and who were about to deny and desert Thee In the hour of Thy deepest need!]

"And when they were awake they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him. And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles — one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias — not knowing what he said."

No doubt it was good to be there — far better than to go down from their elevation and glory to meet all the contradiction and trying obloquy of man. When Peter saw the glory, and Moses and

Elias, it instantly occurred to his Jewish mind that there was no hindrance to the celebration of the feast of tabernacles. He had been asleep while they spoke of “the decease”; he had been indulging nature whilst his Master's sufferings had formed the subject of discourse; and when he awoke, he would fain pitch his tent in the midst of that scene of peace and glory, beneath the open heavens. But ah, he knew not what he said. It was but a passing moment.

The heavenly strangers were soon to depart; the Lord Jesus was to be delivered into the hands of men. He was to pass from the mount of glory to the place of suffering; Peter himself, too, had yet to be sifted by Satan — to be deeply humbled and broken under a sense of his shameful fall — to be girded by another, and carried whither he would not; a long and a dreary season, a dark night of sorrow and tribulation, was in store for the Church; the armies of Rome were yet to trample the holy city in the dust, and lay waste her bulwarks; the thunders of war and political revolution were yet to roll, with terrible vehemence, over the whole civilised world; — all these things, and many more, were to come to pass, ere the fond thought of poor Peter's heart could be realized on earth. The prophet Elijah must visit the earth again “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4: 5). “Elias must first come and restore all things.”

How long, O Lord? May this be the continual inquiry of our hearts as we pass along to that rest and glory which lie before us. “Time is short,” and eternity, with all its divine and glorious realities, is at hand. May we live in the light of it! May we ever be able, by the eye of faith, to see the bright beams of the millennial morning — the morning without clouds — irradiating the distance hills!

Everything points to this; every event that happens, every voice that reaches the ear, tells of the speedy approach of the kingdom: the sea and the waves may be heard roaring — nations are convulsed, thrones overturned; — all these things have a voice for the circumcised ear, and the voice is, “Look up!”

Those who have received the Holy Ghost have received the earnest of the future inheritance; and the earnest, as we know, is part

of the thing to be received. They have been on the mount; and although the cloud may overshadow them too — although they too may have to come down from the mount to meet the trial and sorrow below — yet they have a foretaste of the joy and blessedness which shall be theirs forever; and they can unfeignedly thank God, as they journey on from day to day, that their hopes are not bounded by this world's gloomy horizon, but that they have a home beyond it all.

Oh wondrous grace, oh love divine,

To give us such a home!

Let us the present things resign,

And seek this rest to come.

And gazing on our Saviour's cross,

Esteem all else but dung and dross;

Press forward till the race be run,

Fight till the crown of life be won.

CONCLUSION

Although, in the character of his ministry, Elijah the Tishbite much resembled John the Baptist, as has been already observed, yet looking at him personally, and considering his unearthly and pilgrim path, and specially his rapture to Heaven, he stands before us as a remarkable illustration of the Church, or heavenly family. Taking this view of him, I think a few observations on the important doctrine of the Church will not be considered out of place as a conclusion to the foregoing sketch of his life and times.

It is of the utmost importance that the Christian reader should understand the doctrine of the Church's heavenly character. It will be found to be the only preservative against the varied forms of evil and unsound doctrine which prevail around us. To be soundly instructed in the heavenly origin, heavenly position, and heavenly

destiny of the Church, is the most effectual safeguard against worldliness in the Christian's present path, and also against false teaching in reference to his future hopes.

Every system of doctrine or discipline which would connect the Church with the world, either in her present condition or her future prospects, must be wrong, and must exert an unhallowed influence. The Church is not of the world. Her life, her position, her hopes, are all heavenly in the very highest sense of that word. The calling and existence of the Church are, humanly speaking, consequent upon the present rejection of Israel and the world.

The garden of Eden and the land of Canaan were successively the scenes of divine operation; but sin, as we have often heard marred them both, and now all who believe the gospel of the grace of God, preached to them in the name of a crucified, risen and ascended Saviour, are constituted living members of the body of Christ, and are called upon to abandon every earthly hope. Being quickened by the voice of Him who has passed into the heavens, and not only so, but being united to Him by the Holy Ghost, they are called to occupy the place of strangers and pilgrims on earth.

The position of Elijah the Tishbite as he stood on the wilderness side of Jordan waiting for his rapture to Heaven, aptly represents the condition of the Church collectively or the believer individually. [When I say the wilderness side of Jordan, I only speak of Jordan in reference to the prophet's path. If we look at it in reference to the path of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, we learn a different truth. The spiritual reader will understand both.] The Church, properly so called, finds (as another has said) "the termini of her existence to be the cross and the coming of the Lord"; and surely, we may say, earth has no place between these sacred bounds. To think of the Church as a worldly corporation, be it ever so sound and scriptural, is to sink far below the divine thought about it.

The doctrine of the Church's heavenly character was developed in all its power and beauty by the Holy Ghost in the apostle Paul. Up to his time, and even during the early stages of his ministry, the divine purpose was to deal with Israel. There had been

all along a chain of witnesses, the object of whose mission was exclusively the house of Israel.

The prophets, as has been already observed in the opening of this paper, bore witness to Israel, not only concerning their complete failure, but also the future establishment of *the kingdom* agreeably to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac Jacob, and David. They spoke not of the Church as the body of Christ. How could they, when the thing was a profound mystery, “not revealed to the sons of men”?

The thought of a Church composed of Jew and Gentile, “seated *together* in the heavenlies,” lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony. Isaiah, no doubt, speaks in very elevated strains of Jerusalem's glory in the latter day; he speaks of Gentiles coming to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising; but he never rises higher than the kingdom, and as a consequence never brings out anything beyond the covenant made with Abraham, which secures everlasting blessedness to his seed, and through them to the Gentiles. We may range through the inspired pages of the law and the prophets, from one end to the other, and find nothing concerning “*the great mystery*” of the Church.

Then, again, in the ministry of John the Baptist we observe the same thing. We have the sum and substance of his testimony in these words: “Repent, for *the kingdom is* at hand.” He came as the great precursor of the Messiah, and sought to produce moral order amongst all ranks. He told the people what they were to do in that transition state into which his ministry was designed to conduct them, and pointed to Him that was to come. Have we anything of the *Church* in all this? Not a syllable. The *kingdom is* still the very highest thought. John led his disciples to the waters of Jordan — the place of confession in view of the kingdom; but it was not yet that character of repentance produced in them who are made members of the body of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Himself then took up the chain of testimony. The prophets had been stoned; John had been beheaded; and now “the Faithful Witness” entered the scene, and not only declared that the kingdom was at hand, but presented Himself to the daughter of

Zion as her King. He too was rejected, and, like every previous witness, sealed His testimony with His blood. Israel would not have God's King, and God would not give Israel the kingdom.

Next came the twelve apostles, and took up the chain of testimony. Immediately after the resurrection they inquired of the Lord, "Wilt Thou at this time restore again *the kingdom* to Israel?" Their minds were filled with the thought of the kingdom. "We trusted," said the two disciples going to Emmaus, "that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." And so it was. The question was, *when?* The Lord does not rebuke the disciples for entertaining the thought of the kingdom; He simply tells them, "It is not for you to know *the times or the seasons*, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be *witnesses* unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 7-8).

Agreeably to this, the Apostle Peter, in his address to Israel, offers them *the kingdom*. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and the times of refreshing shall come from the presence (*apo prosopon*) of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

Have we here the development of the Church? No. The time had not yet arrived for this. The revelation of the Church was yet to be, as it were, forced out as something quite extraordinary — something quite out of the regular course of things. The Church as seen in the opening of the Acts exhibits but a sample of lovely grace and order, exquisite indeed in its way, but not anything beyond what man could take cognisance of and value. In a word, it was still the kingdom, and not the great mystery of the Church. Those who think that the opening chapters of Acts present the Church in its essential aspect have by no means reached the divine thought on the subject.

Peter's vision in Acts 10 is decidedly a step in advance of his preaching in Acts 3. Still, however, the grand truth of the heavenly

mystery was not yet unfolded. In the council held at Jerusalem for the purpose of considering the question that had arisen in reference to the Gentiles, we find the apostles all agreeing with James in the following conclusion: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts 15: 14-17) .

Here we are taught that the Gentiles, as such, are to have a place with the Jews in the kingdom.

But did the council at Jerusalem apprehend the truth of the Church, of Jews and Gentiles so truly formed in "one body" that they are no more Jew nor Gentile? I believe not. A few members might have heard it from Paul (see Gal. 2: 12), but as a whole they do not seem to have understood it as yet.

We infer, therefore, that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the mouth of Peter was not the development of *the great mystery* of the Church, but simply the opening of *the kingdom*, agreeable to the words of the prophets, and also to Peter's commission in Matt. 16: "And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys *of the kingdom* of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind *on earth* shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose *on earth* shall be loosed in heaven."

Mark, it is "the kingdom," and not the Church. Peter received the keys of the kingdom, and he used those keys, first to open the kingdom to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. But Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the Church. Even in his Epistles we find nothing of it. He views believers on earth; as strangers, no doubt, but yet on earth; having their hope in Heaven and being on their way thither, but never as the body of Christ seated there in Him.

It was reserved for the great apostle of the Gentiles to bring out, in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of which we speak. He was raised up, however, as he himself tells us, before the time. "Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Things were not sufficiently matured for the development of the new revelation of which he was made the peculiar minister, and hence he styles himself one born *before* the time; for such is the real force of the original word. And how was he before the time? Because Israel had not as yet been finally set aside. The Lord was still lingering over His beloved city, unwilling to enter into judgement; for, as another has said, "Whenever the Lord leaves a place of mercy, or enters a place of judgement, He moves with a slow and measured pace."

This is most true; and hence, although the apostle of the Gentiles had been raised up and constituted the depositary of a truth which was designed to carry all who should receive it far away beyond the bounds of Jewish things, yet did he make the house of Israel his primary object; and in so doing he worked in company with the twelve, although not a debtor to them in any one way. "It was necessary," says he to the Jews, "that the word of God should *first* have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13: 46).

Why was it necessary? Because of God's long-suffering and grace. Paul was not only the depositary of the divine counsels, but also of divine affections. As the former, he should act upon his peculiar commission; as the latter, he would linger over "his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh": as the former, he was called upon to lead the Church into the knowledge of "a mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men"; as the latter, he would, like his Master, with "a slow and measured step," turn his back upon the devoted city and the infatuated nation.

In a word, as the gospel with which he was entrusted could only be proclaimed upon the ground of the total abandonment of earth, the earthly city, and the earthly nation, and as Paul's heart yearned over that nation and city, therefore it was that he was so slow to make known publicly the gospel which he preached. He

delayed for fourteen years, as he himself informs us. "Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain" (Gal. 2: 1-2).

This is a very important passage on the question now before us. Paul had been raised up quite out of the regular course of things; his ministry was totally divested of the earthly, human and Jewish element; so much so indeed as to give rise to numerous questions as to its divine origin.

{There have not been wanting modern teachers who have laboured to deprive Paul's ministry of its peculiarly heavenly character by placing him among the regular college of apostles, whose aspect and bearing were manifestly Jewish. This they do by calling in question the election of Matthias. But to all those who need more than the exercise of spiritual judgement to guide them in this matter it may be sufficient to say that the Holy Ghost raised no question as to the validity of Matthias's election, for He fell upon him in common with his fellow-apostles. However, we can well understand why those who feel themselves called upon to uphold human systems should labour so diligently to reduce our apostle's ministry to a human, or earthly level.}

To him was committed what he emphatically styles *his* gospel. But, as has been remarked, it was a question whether things were ripe as regards the divine counsels respecting Israel, for the public development of this gospel. The apostle felt this to be a momentous question: hence his caution in communicating it *severally* to a few. He could not, even in the midst of the Church at Jerusalem, speak openly on this grand question, because he feared that the full time had not come, and that, should he develop it prematurely, few had sufficient spiritual intelligence or largeness of mind to understand or enter into it. His fears, as we know, were well grounded. There were few at Jerusalem who were at all prepared for Paul's gospel.

Even some years later we find James, who seems to have taken a very prominent place in the Church of Jerusalem, inducing

Paul to purify himself and shave his head. And what was this for? Just to prevent a break-up of the earthly thing.

“Thou seest, brother,” said James, “how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. And they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: we have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law” (Acts 21: 20-24). Here, then, we have abundant proof of the fact that the great mystery was not understood and would not be received by the Church at Jerusalem.

[The circumstance to which allusion is made in the above quotation occurred some years later than the visit to which Paul refers in Gal. 2. The latter would seem to have been occasioned by the controversy respecting the Gentiles. This fact gives additional force to the expression “Severally to them which were of reputation.” Paul could not communicate his gospel to them en masse .]

Now, one can well understand how the spirit of James would have shrunk from the terrible break-up which must have resulted from the public declaration of Paul's gospel amongst those whose hearts still clung to the earthly thing. True, it was the privilege of believing Jews to breathe a purer atmosphere than that of an earthly sanctuary, yet they were not prepared for the strong meat of Paul's gospel, and moreover the heart would cling with peculiar fondness to the thought that Jerusalem was to be a great focus of Christian light and testimony from whence the rays of gospel truth should emanate to enlighten all around. But if the mystery which Paul had communicated to them privately were to be made known to the multitude, “the many thousands of Jews” would not receive it, and thus the great centre of light would have become the centre of division.

Moreover, the very same motive which had actuated Paul on the occasion of his former visit to Jerusalem, when he communicated his gospel only to a few, lest he should run in vain if things were not ripe for the revelation — the same motive, we say, might have led him at a later period to hold his gospel in abeyance, and accommodate himself to the thoughts and feelings of those who had not as yet got beyond the earthly order of things.

Every affection of Paul's heart as a man and a Jew would have led him to linger at Jerusalem, and also to hesitate in the development of a doctrine which would cast Jerusalem and all earthly things into the shade, and raise the thoughts and affections into a far higher and purer region than had yet been realized. Paul knew full well the vanity and emptiness of vows and purifications. He saw nothing in the temple and its splendid ceremonies save a vast system of shadows of which the substance was in Heaven.

Yet his affectionate heart yearned over his brethren who were still captivated by it all, and therefore he hesitated to let the full blaze of the light which had been communicated to him shine upon them, lest it should dazzle them, habituated as they were to the shadows of bygone days.

If this be a sound view of the conduct of our apostle in the matter of the vow, etc., it places him before us in a most truly interesting point of view, and also brings out very distinctly the two features of his character, namely, as the participator in the divine affections towards Israel, and also as the depositary of the divine counsels respecting the Church. Both these are lovely in their way. His fervent affection for Israel and his faithfulness to his own peculiar commission are both exquisite. Some may think he allowed the former to interfere at times with the latter, as in the matter of the vow; but it was an interference which we can well understand and account for.

His heart, however, led him to tarry in Jerusalem; yea, to tarry until the Lord had to compel him to leave it. His commission was to the Gentiles; and yet, again and again he betakes himself to Jerusalem, and in his unwillingness to depart from it reminds us of

the “slow and measured steps” with which the glory as seen by Ezekiel had departed from the temple.

But the Lord would insist upon His servant's leaving Jerusalem. “*Make haste,*” said He, “and *get thee quickly* out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive *thy* testimony concerning Me.” Paul's Jewish heart still lingers. He replies, “They know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee; and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was also standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.”

What pleading is here! “Their unbelief is all my fault; my vileness acts as the great barrier to their reception of the testimony — only let me remain.” Impossible! “Depart: for I will send thee far *hence, to the Gentiles.*” Yes; the truth must be brought out; the divine counsels must be fulfilled; the time was come, and it was in vain for James to seek to stem the mighty current of events, or for Paul to linger or hesitate any longer: the crisis had arrived, and if Paul will after all this return to Jerusalem again, he must be carried away from it in bonds! He does return again.

The passage we have just quoted is Paul's own account of what the Lord had said to him on a former occasion, to which we have no allusion till now. Thus, although he had been expressly told to depart from Jerusalem because they would not receive his testimony, he goes thither again; and we know the result of this visit. It was his last.

The very thing that James dreaded and sought to avoid came upon them: an uproar was raised, and Paul was delivered over into the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was determined to send him to the Gentiles. If he would not go as a free man, he must go as “an ambassador in bonds.” He could say, however, that it was for “the hope of Israel that he was bound with this chain.” If his heart had not longed so after Israel, he might have escaped the bonds. He left Israel without excuse, but he himself became a prisoner and a martyr.

Thus then, at length, Paul took leave of Jerusalem. He had visited it again and again, and would have tarried there; but it was not his place. Jerusalem had been for ages the object of divine regard and the centre of divine operation, but it was speedily about to be trodden down of the Gentiles; its temple was about to be laid in ruins, and the flock of Christ that had been gathered there was about to be scattered abroad; a few short years, and that spot which had stood so long connected with all God's thoughts about earth would be laid low, even with the dust, beneath the rude foot of the Roman.

Now Paul's departure may be looked upon as the immediate precursor of all this. The peculiar truth of which he was the depositary could only be brought out in all its fullness and power in connection with the abandonment of earth as the *manifested* scene of divine operation. Hence Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome must be viewed with deepest interest by the intelligent and reflecting Christian.

[It is a thought full of interest, in connection with the subject before us, that Paul's voyage to Rome gives us the history of the Church as regards its earthly destinies. The vessel sets out in due order, as a compact and well regulated thing, framed to endure the violence of the stormy ocean over which it had to pass. After a time the apostle offers a certain suggestion, which, being rejected, the ship is dashed to pieces by the waves. There was, however, an important distinction between the vessel and the individuals on board: the former was lost, the latter were all saved. Let us *apply* all this to the history of the Church in its earthly path. The testimony, as we know, emanated from Jerusalem, whence Paul started on his way to Rome. Apostolic testimony was designed to guide the Church in its earthly course, and preserve it from shipwreck: but this being rejected, failure and ruin were the consequences. But, in the progress of the failure, we perceive the distinction between the preservation of the Church's corporate testimony and individual faithfulness and salvation. "He that hath ears to hear" will always find a word of instruction and guidance for him in times of thickest darkness. The waves may dash in pieces the corporate thing — everything connected with earth may vanish away, "but he that doeth the will of

God abideth forever.” The above picture might be traced far more minutely by those who feel they have intelligence and warrant to do so.]

But we may ask, did our apostle, when he turned his back upon Jerusalem, take leave also of Israel? No; he did not yet despair. True they had not received his testimony at Jerusalem, but perhaps they might receive it at Rome: they had not given him a place in the East, perhaps they would in the West. At all events he would try. He would not abandon Israel, though Israel had rejected him.

Hence we read that “after three days [from the time of his arrival at Rome] Paul called *the chief of the Jews* together; and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.... For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.... And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28: 17, 20, 23).

Here, then, we have this blessed “ambassador in bonds” still seeking out “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and offering them, in the first place, “the salvation of God.” But “they agreed not among themselves,” and at last Paul is constrained to say, “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them. BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT. “

There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose; and our apostle, with a

reluctant heart, shuts them up under the power of that judicial blindness which was the natural result of their rejection of the salvation of God. Thus every obstacle to the clear and full development of Paul's gospel was removed. He found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world — a prisoner at Rome and rejected of Israel. He had done his utmost to tarry among them; his affectionate heart led him to delay as long as possible ere he would reiterate the prophet's verdict; but now all was over — every expectation was blasted — all human institutions and associations present to his view nothing but ruin and disappointment; he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations — the mystery of the Church as the body of Christ united to its living Head by the Holy Ghost.

Thus closes the Acts of the Apostles, which, like the Gospels, is more or less connected with the testimony to Israel. So long as Israel could be regarded as the object of testimony, so long the testimony continued; but when they were shut up to judicial blindness, they ceased to come within the range of testimony, wherefore the testimony ceased.

And now let us see what this “mystery,” this “gospel,” this “salvation,” really was, and wherein its peculiarity consisted. To understand this is of the utmost importance. What, therefore, was Paul's gospel? Was it a different method of justifying a sinner from that preached by the other apostles? No; by no means. Paul preached both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” This was the substance of his preaching.

The peculiarity of the gospel preached by Paul had not so much reference to God's way of dealing with *the sinner* as with *the saint*; it was not so much how God justified a sinner as what He did with him when justified. Yes — it was the place into which Paul's gospel conducted the *saint* that marked its peculiarity. As regards the justification of a sinner, there could be but one way, namely, through faith in the one offering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there could be numerous degrees of elevation as regards the standing of the saint. For example, a saint in the opening of Acts had higher privileges than a saint under the law. Moses, the prophets, John, our Lord in His personal ministry, and the twelve, all brought out varied aspects of the believer's position before God. But Paul's gospel went far beyond them all. It was not the kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts 3 and Acts 10; but it was *the heavenly calling of the Church of God composed of Jew and Gentile, in one body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Ghost.*

The Epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this. There we find ample instruction as to our heavenly standing, heavenly hopes, and heavenly conflict. The apostle does not contemplate the Church as a pilgrim *on earth*, (which, we need not say, is most true,) but as sitting *in Heaven*: not as toiling *here*, but resting *there*. "He hath raised us up together, and made us *sit* together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." It is not that He *will* do this, but "He hath" done it. When Christ was raised from the dead, all the members of His body were raised also; when He ascended into Heaven they ascended also; when He sat down, they sat down also; that is, in the counsel of God, and to be actualised in process of time by the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

Such was the thought and purpose of the divine mind concerning them. Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on; and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back; but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the apostle of the Gentiles, from his prison at Rome, writes to the Church, and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the Heavens with Christ. When Paul arrived at Rome as a prisoner he had, as it were, arrived at the end of all human things. He no longer thought of the Church as exhibiting anything like a perfect testimony on earth. He knew how things would turn out as regards the Church's earthly path; he

knew that it would fare with it even as it had fared with the vessel in which he had sailed from Jerusalem to Rome; but his spirit was buoyed up by the happy assurance that nothing could touch the unity of the body of Christ, because it was a unity infallibly maintained by God Himself.

[I believe it is of the deepest moment that the believer should avoid all looseness of thought, or indifference, in reference to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church and the unity of the body of Christ. The man who holds the former will assuredly seek the latter.]

This was the spring of Paul's joy as he lay a despised and neglected prisoner in the dungeon of Nero. He was not ashamed, for he knew that the Church, though broken in pieces here, was nevertheless held in the everlasting grasp of the Son of God, and that He was able to keep it until the happy moment of its rapture to meet Him in the air.

[A letter has been put into my hand. from a dear and valued servant of Christ. from which I extract the following statements which are well worthy of attention: "The Holy Ghost came down from heaven to form one body on the earth 'for by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body.' This is the unity we are responsible to maintain — the unity of the Spirit, the other, final one, God secures infallibly. If God set in the Church 'healings,' it certainly is not in heaven. One has only to read 1 Cor. 10 - 11 to learn that the unity of the Church on earth is a fundamental, essential, divine institution — the cardinal truth which will distinguish, I believe, those who have faith to walk devotedly in these last days, and without which the expectation of Christ will be only personal deliverance, and not 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.'"]

But it may be asked: How can believers be said to be seated in heavenly places when they are yet in the world, struggling with its difficulties, its sorrows and temptations? The same question may be asked in reference to the important doctrine of Rom. 6: How can believers be represented as dead to sin when they find sin working in them continually? The answer to both is one and the same.

God sees the believer as dead with Christ, and He also sees the Church as raised with and seated in Christ; but it is the province of faith to lead the soul into the reality of both. "Reckon yourselves to be" what God tells you you are. The believer's power to subdue indwelling corruption consists in his reckoning himself to be dead to it; and his power of separation from the world consists in his reckoning himself to be raised with Christ and seated in Him. The Church, according to God's estimation, has as little to do with sin and the world as Christ has; but God's thoughts and our apprehensions are very different things.

We must never forget that every tendency of the human mind not only falls short of but stands actually opposed to all this divine truth about the Church. We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it — how it was forced out, as it were, and pressed upon him; and we have only to glance at the history of the Church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to earth, and the thought of an earthly corporation is attractive to it.

Hence we may expect that the truth of the Church's heavenly character will only be apprehended and carried out by a very small and feeble minority.

It is not to be supposed that the Protestant reformers exercised their thoughts on this momentous subject. They were made instrumental in bringing out the precious doctrine of justification by faith from amid the rubbish of Romish superstition, and also in letting in upon the human conscience the light of inspiration in opposition to the false and ensnaring dogmas of human tradition.

This was doing not a little: yet it must be admitted the position and hopes of the Church engaged not their attention. It would have been a bold step from the church of Rome to the Church of God; and yet it will be found in the end that there is not distinct neutral ground between the two; for every church, or, to speak more accurately, every religious corporation, reared up and carried on by the wisdom and resources of man, be its principle ever so pure and ever so hostile to Catholicism, will be found, when judged by the Spirit, and

in the light of Heaven, to partake more or less of the element of the Romish system.

The heart clings to earth, and will with difficulty be led to believe that the only time wherein God ceases to be manifestly occupied about earth — that the only unnoticed interval in the history of time — is just the period wherein He, by the Holy Ghost, is gathering out the Church to form the body of Christ; and moreover, that when God was dealing publicly with earth, the Church, properly so called, was not contemplated; and that when He shall resume His public dealings with the earth and with Israel, the Church will be out of the scene.

To understand all this requires a larger measure of spirituality than is to be found with many Christians.* The question naturally arises in the mind of the inquirer after truth, “What is the most scriptural form of Church government?” To what body of Christians should I attach myself?” The answer to such questions is, “Attach yourself to those who are 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'”

{*The reader will, I trust, understand the distinction between God's *public* actings and His secret operations by His providence. The former ceased when Israel was set aside, and will be resumed when Israel comes again into notice; the latter are going on now. God controls the wheels of government and the counsels of kings to bring about His own great designs.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill,

He treasures up His bright designs,

And works His sovereign will.}

Sects are not the Church, nor religious parties the body of Christ. Hence, to be attached to the sects is to find ourselves in some of those numerous tributary streams which are rapidly flowing onward into the terrible vortex of which we read in Rev. 17 and 18.

Let us not be deceived — principles will work, and systems will find their proper level. Prejudice will operate, and hinder the carrying out of those heavenly principles of which we speak.

Those who will maintain Paul's gospel will find themselves, like him, deserted and despised amid the splendid pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy, will surely drown the feeble voices of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the Church.

But let the spiritual man who finds himself in the midst of all this sad and heart-sickening confusion remember the following simple principle: *Every system of ecclesiastical discipline, and every system of prophetic interpretation, which would connect the Church, in any one way, with the world, or things of the world, must be contrary to the spirit and principles of the great mystery developed by the Holy Ghost in the apostle of the Gentiles.*

The Church stands in no need of the world's aid in the matter of order or discipline. The Holy Ghost dwells in the Church, broken and scattered though it be, notwithstanding all man's unbelief about it; and if there be any introduction of the earthly or human element, it can only have the sad effect of grieving Him whose presence is the very light of believers and the spring and power of ministry and discipline.

And then, as to the Church's hope, “we look for the Saviour,” and not for the accomplishment of any earthly event. Thank God, believers are not taught to wait for the revelation of Antichrist, but for the appearing of the blessed Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them. Christians should understand that they have nothing to look for save their rapture into the air to meet the Lord. The world may ridicule the idea, and false teachers may build up systems hostile to it, for the purpose of shaking the faith of the simple-minded; but through grace we will continue to “comfort one another” with the assurance that “the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.”

I must now close this paper. I am deeply conscious of how feebly and incoherently I have developed what I have in my mind concerning the doctrine of the Church; but I have no doubt of its real importance, and feel assured that as the time draws near much light will be communicated to believers about it. At present, it is to be feared, few really enter into it.

If it were understood, there would be far less effort to attain a name and a place on earth. Paul, the great witness of the Church's heavenly calling, must have exhibited a poor spectacle in the view of the children of this world, and so will all who maintain his principles and walk in his steps; but he comforted his spirit with the thought that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His"; and he also knew that in the very darkest time there would be a few who would "call on the Lord out of a pure heart." May our lot be cast among such, in the midst of this sorrowful scene, until we shall see Jesus as He is, and be made like Him forever!

2 Chronicles 4

THE BRAZEN SEA

“And Solomon made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. And under it was the similitude of oxen which did compass it round about; ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the North, and three looking toward the West, and three looking toward the South, and three looking toward the East; and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward. And the thickness of it was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of a brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies; and it received and held three thousand baths *the sea was for the priests to wash in.*” (2 Chr. 4: 2-6).

In order to have a clear understanding of the doctrine taught us in this beautiful and significant figure, three things demand our attention — the material, the contents and the objects. May God the Spirit guide our thoughts and speak to our hearts as we dwell upon these things!

The material. Solomon's molten sea was made of brass, the apt symbol of divine righteousness demanding judgment upon sin (as in the brazen altar) or demanding judgment upon uncleanness (as in the brazen sea). The Lord Jesus is spoken of in Revelation 1 as having “His feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace.” It is thus He is seen walking among the candlesticks. He cannot tolerate evil, but must, in the exercise of judgment, trample it beneath His feet. This will explain the reason why the altar where sin was expiated and the sea where defilement was washed away, were both made of brass. Everything in Scripture has its meaning and we should seek in a spirit of prayer to ascertain what that meaning is.

It is most comforting and establishing to the heart to be assured that the sin which God freely pardons and the uncleanness

which He freely removes have been both fully and forever judged and condemned in the cross. Not a single jot or tittle of guilt, not a single trace of uncleanness, has been passed over. All has been divinely judged. “Mercy rejoiceth against judgment” and “grace reigns through righteousness” (James 2: 13; Rom. 5: 21). The believer is pardoned and cleansed: his guilt and uncleanness were judged on the cross. The knowledge of this most precious truth works in a double way. It sets the heart and conscience perfectly free and also causes us to abhor sin and uncleanness with an ever growing intensity. The altar of brass told forth in silent yet impressive eloquence, its double story: guilt had been divinely condemned, dear testimony to the fact that uncleanness had been divinely judged, and on that ground, could be divinely washed away.

What deep consolation for the heart in all this! And yet it is holy consolation. I cannot gaze upon the antitype of the altar and lightly commit sin. I cannot think upon the antitype of the molten sea and indifferently contract defilement. My consolation is deep and solid because I know I am pardoned and cleansed, but my consolation is holy because I know that Jesus had to yield up His life to procure my pardon and cleansing. God has been perfectly glorified; sin and uncleanness have been perfectly condemned; I am set eternally free; but the death of Christ is the basis of all. Such is the consolatory yet holy lesson taught us in the material of the brazen altar and the molten sea. Nothing is passed over by God, yet nothing is imputed to me because Christ was judged for all.

Let us now consider *the contents* of Solomon's molten sea. “It received and held three thousand baths” of water. If at the altar I see brass in connection with blood, at the sea I find brass in connection with water. Both point to Christ. “This is He that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by water only, but water and blood” (1 John 5: 6). “But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side and forthwith came there out *blood and water*” (John 19: 34). The blood that expiates and the water that cleanses both flow from a crucified Savior. Precious and solemn truth! Precious, because we have expiation and cleansing; solemn, because of the way in which we get them.

But the brazen sea contained water, not blood. Those who approached thereto had *already* proved the power of the blood and therefore only needed the washing of water. Thus it was in the type and thus it is with the antitype. A priest under the law, whose hands and feet had become defiled, did not need to go back to the brazen altar, but forward to the brazen sea. He did not need to again apply the blood to constitute him a priest, but only to wash with water to enable him to discharge his priestly functions. So now, if a believer fails, if he commits sin, if he contracts defilement, he does not need to be again washed in the blood as at the first, but simply needs the cleansing action of the Word whereby the Holy Spirit applies to the soul the remembrance of what Christ has done. So the defilement is removed, the communion restored and the spiritual priest fitted afresh to discharge his priestly functions. "He that is washed needeth not except to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (John 13: 10). "The worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10: 2). Does this make little of defilement? The very opposite! Did the provision of a molten sea, with its 3000 baths of water, make little of priestly defilement? Did it not rather prove how much was made of it, what a serious matter it was in the judgment of God, how impossible it was to go on with a single soil upon the hands and feet?

Let my reader ponder this matter. Let him examine it in the light of Scripture. Let him make sure he really understands it. There is, in many cases, a great lack of clearness as to the doctrine set forth in the brazen altar and the molten sea. Hence, so many earnest Christians get into spiritual darkness and trouble as to the question of daily sins and daily defilement. They do not see the divine completeness of their cleansing by the blood of Christ. They therefore entertain the idea that they must, on every fresh occasion, go as at the beginning to the brazen altar as if they had never been washed at all. This is a mistake. When once a man is purged by the blood of Jesus, he is clean forever. If Christ has cleansed me, I am divinely, eternally clean. I am introduced into a condition to which perfect cleanness attaches and I can never be out of it. I may lose the *sense* of it, the *power* of it, the *enjoyment* of it. Peter speaks of some forgetting that they were purged from their old sins. If sin be trifled with and if self be not judged, it is hard to say what a Christian may

come to. The Lord give us to walk softly and tenderly before Him every day so we may not come under the blinding and hardening influence of sin!

But be it remembered that the most effective safeguard against the working and the influence of sin is to have the heart established in grace and to be clear in the understanding of our standing in Christ. To be dark or doubtful as to these things is the sure way of falling into Satan's snares. If I am seeking to live a holy life in order to establish my position before God, I shall either be propped up in pharisaism or be plunged into some horrible sin. But when I know that all my sins and all my defilements were judged and condemned in the cross, and that I am justified and accepted in a risen Christ, then I stand on the true ground of holiness. And if I fail, as I do constantly, I can bring my failure to God in confession and self-judgment and know Him as faithful and just to forgive me my sins and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness.

I judge myself on the ground that Christ has been already judged before God for the very thing which I confess in His presence. If it were not so, my confession would be of no use. The only ground on which God can be "faithful and just to forgive and cleanse" is that Christ has already been judged on my behalf. And most assuredly, God will not execute judgment twice for the same thing. Blessedly true it is, I must confess and judge myself if I have gone wrong. A single sinful thought is sufficient to interrupt my communion. Every such thought must be judged before my communion can proceed. *But it is as a purged one that I confess. I am no longer viewed as a sinner, having to do with God as a Judge. I am now in the position of a child having to do with God as a Father.* He has made provision for my daily need, a provision which does not involve a denial of my place and portion or an ignoring of the work of Christ, but a provision which tells me at once of the holiness and grace of Him who made it. I am not to ignore the altar because I need the sea, but I am to adore the grace of Him who provided both the one and the other.

Having said thus much on the material and contents of Solomon's molten sea, a few words will suffice as to *the object thereof*. "The sea was for the priests to wash in." There came the

priests from day to day to wash their hands and feet so they might always be in a fit condition to go through their priestly work. This is a striking type of God's spiritual priests — of all true believers whose works and ways need to be cleansed by the action of the Word. Both the brazen laver in the tabernacle and the brazen sea in the temple foreshadowed that “washing of water by the Word” which Christ is now carrying on by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ in Person is acting up in heaven for us; by His Spirit and Word, He is acting in us and on us. Only thus are we enabled to get on. He restores us when we wander; He cleanses us from every soil; He corrects our every error. He ever lives for us. We are saved daily by His life. He maintains us in the full power and integrity of the position in which His precious blood has set us. All is secured in Him. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water *by the Word*, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5: 25-27).

Finally, one word as to the “oxen” which held up the brazen sea. The ox is used in Scripture as the symbol of patient labor. Hence their significant place beneath the brazen sea. From whatever side the priest approached, he was met by the apt expression of patient labor. It mattered not how often or in what way he came, he could never exhaust the patience that was devoted to the work of cleansing him from all his defilements. What a precious figure! And we have the substance in Christ. *We can never weary Him by our frequent coming. His patience is exhaustless.* He will not tire until He presents us to Himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

May our hearts adore Him who is our Altar, our Laver, our Sacrifice, our Priest, our Advocate, our All!

2 Chronicles 17

Jehoshaphat — Worldliness.

In tracing the inspired record of the houses of Israel and Judah, from the period of their separation, under Rehoboam, we can without difficulty recognize the marked distinction between them. The line of kings from Jeroboam to Hosea presents only a dark and sorrowful catalogue of evil-doers in the sight of the Lord: we look in vain for an exception. Even Jehu, who manifested so much zeal and energy in the abolition of idolatry, proved, in the sequel, that his heart was far from being right with God. In fact, a dark cloud of idolatry seems to have settled upon the whole house of Israel, until they were carried away beyond Babylon, and scattered amongst the Gentiles.

Not so, however, with Judah. Here we find some happy exceptions — some pleasant rays from that lamp which the Lord so graciously granted in Jerusalem for David His servant's sake. The soul is refreshed by the history of such men as Josiah, Asa, Joash, and Hezekiah — men whose hearts were devoted to the service of the sanctuary, and who therefore exerted a holy influence on their times.

It is on the narrative of one of these blessed exceptions that I desire to dwell for a little, trusting the Lord to give instruction and profit in so doing.

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, is introduced to our notice in 2 Chronicles 17. In this chapter, we find God, in His grace, establishing His servant in the kingdom, and the people of God acknowledging him therein. Jehoshaphat's first act was to "strengthen himself against Israel." This is worthy of notice. Israel and Israel's king were ever a snare to the heart of Jehoshaphat. But in the opening of his course, in the season of his early freshness, he was able to fortify his kingdom against the power of Israel. Now, one frequently observes this in the history of Christians; the evils which in after life prove their greatest snares are those against which there is the greatest watchfulness at first.

Most happy is it when the spirit of watchfulness increases with our increasing knowledge of the tendencies and capabilities of our hearts. But this, alas! is not always the way: on the contrary, how frequently do we find Christians of some years' standing indulging in things which at first their consciences would have shrunk from. This may seem to be but a growing out of a legal spirit; but should it not rather be viewed as a growing out of a tender and sensitive conscience? It would be sad if the result of more enlarged views were to be a careless spirit or a seared conscience; or if high principles of truth did but tend to render those who were once self-denying and separated, self-indulgent, careless, and worldly. But it is not so. To grow in the knowledge of truth is to grow in the knowledge of God, and to grow in the knowledge of God is to grow in practical holiness. The conscience that can let pass without reproof things from which it would formerly have shrunk is, it is much to be feared, instead of being under the action of the truth of God, under the hardening influence of the deceitfulness of sin.

The whole scene presented to us (chap. 17) is full of interest. Jehoshaphat not only retains the conquests of Asa, his father, but goes on to extend, by his personal exertions, the interests of his kingdom. All is well ordered. "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in *the first ways* of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord: moreover, he took away the high places and groves out of Israel." Here was the true secret of his prosperity: "His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord." When the heart is *thus* lifted up, every thing goes well.

In 2 Chronicles 18, however, we have a very different state of things. Jehoshaphat's prosperity is used by the devil as a snare for him. "Jehoshaphat had riches and honours in abundance, and *Joined affinity with Ahab.*" We have already observed Jehoshaphat fortifying his *kingdom*; but the enemy comes upon him in a way for which Jehoshaphat does not seem to have prepared himself; he does

not attack his *kingdom*, he attacks his *heart*. He comes not as the lion, but as the serpent. Ahab's "sheep and oxen" are found more suitable and effectual than Ahab's men of war. Had Ahab declared war against Jehoshaphat, it would only have cast him upon the Lord; but he does not. Jehoshaphat's kingdom is fortified against Ahab's hostilities, but his heart lies open to Ahab's allurements. This is truly solemn! We often make a great effort against evil in one shape, while we are allowing it to get in upon us in another.

Jehoshaphat had at first strengthened himself against Israel, but now he joins affinity with Israel's king. And why? Had any change for the better taken place? Had Ahab's heart become more tender toward the Lord? By no means. *He* was still the same, but Jehoshaphat's conscience had lost much of its early tenderness and sensitiveness: he had come near to the evil, and tampered with it; he had touched the pitch, and was defiled by it. "He joined affinity with Ahab." Here was the evil — an evil which, however slow in its operation, would certainly produce its own fruit sooner or later. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8). The truth of this must inevitably be realized. Grace may triumph in the forgiveness of sin, but the legitimate fruit will spring forth in due time. The Lord put away David's sin in the matter of Uriah, but the child died, and Absalom arose in rebellion. So it will ever be. If we sow to the flesh, we must reap corruption; the flesh can produce naught else.

In Jehoshaphat's case, it was not until *after years* that the results of his false steps began to show themselves: "And after certain years, he went down to Ahab to Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead." Satan knows his ground; he knows where the seed of evil has taken root; he knows the heart that is prepared to respond to his temptation; he knew that the "affinity" into which the king of Judah had entered with the king of Israel had prepared him for further steps in a downward course. When a Christian enters into connection with the world, he lays himself open to be "*persuaded*" by the world, to enter upon an unchristian course of action. David

took Ziklag from Achish (1 Sam. 27: 6), and the next step was, to join Achish against Israel (1 Sam. 28: 1).

The world will never give any thing to a child of God without making large demands in return. When the king of Judah had allowed Ahab to kill sheep and oxen for him, he would have found it difficult not to meet Ahab's desire in reference to Ramoth-gilead. The safest way therefore is, to be no debtor to the world. Jehoshaphat should have had nothing whatever to do with Ahab; he should have kept himself pure. The Lord was not with Ahab, and though it might seem a desirable thing to recover one of the cities of refuge out of the hand of the enemy, yet Jehoshaphat should have known that he was not to do evil that good might come. If we join with the world in its schemes, we must expect to be identified with it in its convulsions.

Ramoth-gilead had been of old assigned as a city of refuge for the slayer (Deut. 4: 43), and to recover this city from the king of Syria was the object of Ahab's expedition. But behind this we can detect the snare of the enemy, who cared little about the city, provided he could thereby betray a child of God from the path of purity and separation. The devil has always found religious and benevolent objects most effectual in their influence upon the people of God. He does not come at first with something openly ungodly; he does not tempt a believer to join the world for some wicked design, because he knows that the sensitive conscience would shrink from such a thing; his way is rather to present in the distance some desirable object — to cover his schemes with the cloak of religion or benevolence, and thus ensnare.

There is, however, one truth which would, if realized, effectually deliver the Christian from all connection with the men of this world. The apostle, by the Holy Ghost, teaches us that unbelievers are "unto *every* good work reprobate" (Titus 1: 16). This is enough for an obedient soul. We must not join with those who are so represented. It matters not what they propose — be it a work of benevolence or a work of religion, — Scripture tells us they are reprobate, yes, "reprobate," though they profess that they know God. This should be sufficient. God cannot accept or acknowledge the works or offerings of those whose hearts are far from Him; nor

should the Church mingle with such, even though it be for the accomplishment of desirable ends. "Keep thyself pure" is a valuable admonition for us all. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." It would have been infinitely better and more acceptable for Jehoshaphat to have kept himself pure from all contact with Ahab's defilement than to have recovered Ramoth from the Syrians, even had he succeeded in doing so.

However, he had to learn this by painful experience. And thus it is that most of us learn our lessons. We may *speak* much of certain points of truth, while we know but little of having learnt them experimentally. When Jehoshaphat at the commencement of his career strengthened himself against Israel, he had little idea of the way in which he would afterward be ensnared by the very worst of Israelites. The only effectual safeguard against evil is, to be in communion with God about it. When we look at evil in the light of the holiness of God, we not only look at the *act*, but at the *principle*; and if the principle be unsound, no matter what the result may be, we should have nothing to do with it. But to deal thus with evil requires much exercise of soul before God — much spirituality, much self-judgement, much prayer and watchfulness. The Lord grant us these, and also more tenderness and godly sensitiveness of conscience.

We have no idea of the sad consequences of a mistake on the part of a child of God. It is not always that the full results appear to us; but the enemy takes care to make his own use of the matter, not in injury done to the one who makes the mistake merely, but to others who witness and are influenced by it. Jehoshaphat did not only fall into the snare himself, but he led others in also. "I am as thou art," said he; and further, "My people as thy people." What miserably low ground for a man of God to take! and what a place to put the people of God into — "*I am as thou art*"! Thus spake Jehoshaphat, and well was it for him that his words were not verified throughout. God did not judge of *him* as He judged of *Ahab*; here was his real security, even in the midst of the terrible consequences of his unguarded conduct. He was not as Ahab in the close of his career, though he had joined affinity with him for the purpose of carrying out his plans; he was not as Ahab when Ahab was pierced

by an arrow; he was not as Ahab when the dogs licked Ahab's blood. The Lord had made him to differ.

But we should remember that when the Christian joins with the world for any purpose whatsoever, whether of religion or of benevolence, he is just saying (as Jehoshaphat said to Ahab), "I am as thou art." Let the Christian reader ask his own heart, Is this right? Is he prepared to say this? It will not do to say, "We are not to judge others." Jehoshaphat ought to have judged, as is manifested from the language of Jehu the prophet, when he met him on his return from Ramoth, "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?" How was he to know who was ungodly, or who hated the Lord, if he did not exercise judgement? We have certainly no right to judge those that are without, but we are bound to exercise judgement as to those with whom we enter into fellowship. Nor does this in the least involve of necessity the idea of one's own personal superiority in any one particular. No; it is not, "Stand by thyself: I am holier than *thou*;" but, "I must stand apart, because *God is holy*." This is the true principle. It is upon the ground of what God is (not of what we are) that we separate from known evil. "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

Jehoshaphat, however, failed to maintain this separation; and, as has been already remarked, in failing himself, led others into failure. In this we may learn a most solemn lesson. Jehoshaphat had, we may suppose, gained very considerable influence over the hearts of the people by his previous devotedness; he had established himself in their confidence and affections; and, to a certain extent, rightly so. It is right that those who walk devotedly should be loved and confided in; but then we must watch most jealously against the dangerous tendency of mere personal influence. No one save a man of extensive influence could have said, "My people are as thy people." He might have said, "I am as thou art," but no more. His extensive influence, when used out of communion, only made him a more efficient instrument of evil. Satan knew this; he knew his mark; he did not fasten on an ordinary man of Judah, but on the most prominent and influential man he could find, well knowing that if he could only succeed in drawing him aside, others would follow in his train.

Nor was he mistaken. Many would no doubt say, "What harm can there be in joining Ahab's expedition? Surely, if there were any thing wrong in it, such a good man as king Jehoshaphat would not engage in it. So long as we see *him* there, *we* may make our minds easy about the matter." But if this were not the language of some in Jehoshaphat's day, it certainly is of many in our own. How often do we hear Christians say, "How can such-and-such things be wrong, when we see such good men in connection with them, or engaging in them?" Now all that can be said of such reasoning is that it is utterly false; it is beginning quite at the wrong end. We are responsible to God to act upon principle, let others do as they may. We should be able, through grace, humbly, yet decidedly, to render a sound and intelligent reason for whatever course of action we may adopt, without any reference to the conduct of others. Moreover, we know full well that good men go astray, and do wrong things. They are not, therefore, nor can they be, our guides. "To his own master he standeth or falleth." A spiritual mind, a conscience enlightened by the Word of God, a real sense of personal responsibility, together with honesty of purpose, are what we specially need. If we lack these, our path will be defective.

But it may be said, there are few, if any, who occupy a position in which their conduct could exert such an extensive influence as that of king Jehoshaphat. To meet this, it may be needful to dwell a little upon a truth sadly neglected in the present day, namely, that *of the unity of the body of Christ, and the consequent effect which the conduct of each member, however obscure, must produce upon the whole body.*

The great doctrine of the unity of the Church upon earth is, it is to be feared, feebly apprehended and feebly carried out, even by the most spiritually minded and intelligent of the Lord's people. The reason of this is very apparent. The doctrine is viewed rather in the light of the Church's present condition, than of her condition as presented in the New Testament; and this being so, the unity never can be understood. If we simply take Scripture for our guide, we shall have no difficulty about it. There we read, "If *one* member suffer, *all* the members suffer with it." This principle did not hold good in the days of king Jehoshaphat, because the body of Christ,

properly so called, had no actual existence. All the members of it were written in God's book; but "as yet there was none of them" — they existed in the purpose of God, but that purpose had not been actualized. Hence, though so many were led astray by the influence of Jehoshaphat, it was not by any means on the principle stated in the above passage; it was not all suffering from the act of one because they were one body, but many being led astray by one because they followed his example. The distinction is very important. There is no member of the Church, how obscure soever, whose path and conduct do not affect, in some measure, all the members. "By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Hence, if a Christian be walking loosely or carelessly, — if he be out of communion — if he fail in prayer, in watchfulness, or in self-judgement, he is really injuring the whole body; and, on the contrary, when he is walking in spiritual health and vigour, he is promoting the blessing and interest of all.

It was not without a struggle that Jehoshaphat yielded to the solicitations of Ahab. The working of conscience is observable in the words, "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today." But ah! how futile was prayer for guidance, when he had already said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war"! It is but solemn mockery to ask for guidance when we have made up our minds; and yet how frequently we do so! How frequently do we decide on a course of action, and then go and ask the Lord about it! All this is wretched; it is only honouring God with the lips, while the heart is in positive rebellion against Him. Instead of getting that guidance for which we profess to ask, may we not rather expect a lying spirit to be sent forth to us? (verse 21) Ahab was at no loss for counsellors. He speedily "gathered together four hundred prophets," who were ready to counsel him according to his heart's desire: "Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand." This was what he wanted. Nor need we marvel at Ahab's being quite satisfied with prophets like these. They suited him well.

But surely Jehoshaphat should not have even appeared to acknowledge them to be prophets of the Lord, as he evidently did, by saying, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord *besides* (or, as the

margin reads, "yet one more?") Had he been faithful to the Lord, he would at once have denied the right of these false prophets to give counsel. But, alas! he was giving full countenance to the religion of the world, and to these its ministers. He could not bring himself to hurt Ahab's feelings by dealing faithfully with his prophets. They were all, it would seem, proper men.

How dreadful a thing it is to allow ourselves to get into a condition of soul in which we are unable to bear distinct and faithful testimony against the ministers of Satan! "We must," it is said, "be liberal;" "we must not hurt people's feelings;" "there are good men every where." But truth is truth, and we are not to put error for truth, nor truth for error. Nothing but a secret desire to stand well with the world will ever lead to this careless method of dealing with evil. Now, if we want to stand well with the world, let us do it at our own charges, and not at the expense of God's truth. It is often urged, "We must present truth in such an aspect as will attract," when what is really meant is this, that truth is to be made a kind of variable, elastic thing, which can be turned into any shape, or stretched to any length, to suit the taste and habits of those who would fain put it out of the world altogether.

Truth, however, cannot be thus treated; it can never be made to reduce itself to the level of this world. Those who profess to hold it may seek to use it thus, but it will ever be found the same pure, holy, faithful witness against the world and all its ways. It will speak distinctly, if its voice be not stifled by connection with the practice of its faithless professors. When Jehoshaphat had stooped so low as to acknowledge the false prophets for the purpose of gratifying Ahab, who could observe any distinct testimony for God? All seemed to sink down to the one common level, and the enemy to have it all his own way. The voice of truth was hushed: the prophets prophesied falsely: God was forgotten. Thus must it ever be.

The attempt to accommodate truth to those who are of the world can only end in complete failure. There can be no accommodation. Let it stand upon its own heavenly height; let saints stand fully and firmly with it; let them invite sinners up to them; but let them not descend to the low and grovelling pursuits and habits of the world, and thus rob truth, so far as in them lies, of all its edge

and power. It is far better to allow the contrast between God's truth and our ways to be fully seen, than to attempt to identify them in appearance, when they really do not agree. We may think to commend truth to the minds of the worldly people by an effort to conform to their ways but, so far from commending it, we in reality expose it to secret contempt and scorn. Jehoshaphat certainly did not further the cause of truth by conforming to Ahab's ways, or by acknowledging the claims of his false prophets. The man who conforms to the world will be the enemy of Christ, and the enemy of Christ's people. It cannot be otherwise. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

How fully was this proved in the case of king Jehoshaphat! He became the friend and companion of Ahab, who hated Micaiah, the servant of God; and as a consequence, although he did not himself positively persecute the righteous witness, yet he did what was bad; for he sat beside Ahab, and beheld the Lord's prophet first struck, and then committed to prison, simply because he would not tell a lie to please a wicked king, and harmonise with four hundred wicked prophets. What must have been the feelings of Jehoshaphat when he beheld his brother smitten and imprisoned for his faithfulness in testifying against an expedition in which he himself was engaged! Yet such was the position into which his connection with Ahab had forced him that he could not avoid being a witness of these wicked proceedings; yea, and moreover, a partaker of them also. When a man associates himself with the world, he must do so thoroughly. The enemy will not be satisfied with half measures; on the contrary, he will use every effort to force a saint out of communion into the most terrible extremes of evil.

The beginning of evil is like the letting out of water. Small beginnings lead to fearful results. There is first a slight tampering with evil at a distance; then, by degrees, a nearer approach to it; after this, a taking hold of it more firmly; and finally, a deliberate plunge into it, whence nothing but the most marked interposition of God can rescue. Jehoshaphat "joined affinity with Ahab"; then accepted of his hospitality; after that, was "persuaded" into open association with him; and finally, took *his* place at the battle of Ramoth-gilead.

He had said to Ahab, "I am as thou art," and Ahab takes him at his word; for he says to him, "I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes."

Thus, so completely did Jehoshaphat surrender his personal identity, in the view of the men of the world, that "it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, '*It is the king of Israel.*'" Terrible position for Jehoshaphat! To find him personating, and thus mistaken for, the worst of Israel's kings is a sad proof of the danger of associating with the men of the world. Happy was it for Jehoshaphat that the Lord did not take him at his word when he said to Ahab, "I am as thou art." The Lord knew that Jehoshaphat was not Ahab, though he might personate and be mistaken for him. Grace had made him to differ, and conduct should have *proved* him to be what grace had made him. But, blessed be God, "He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," and He graciously delivered His poor servant out of the evil into which he had plunged himself, and in which he would have perished, had not the hand of God been stretched out to rescue him. "Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him."

[The reader will doubtless observe how the inspired writer presents God under two different titles in the above verse. *The Lord*" brings out His connection with His distressed servant — His connection in grace; while the expression "God" shows out the powerful control which He exercised over the Syrian captains. It is needless to say that this distinction is divinely perfect As Lord, He deals with His own redeemed people, — meeting all their weakness, and supplying all their need; but as God, He holds in His omnipotent hand the hearts of all men, to turn them whithersoever He will. Now we generally find unconverted persons using the expression "God," and not "Lord." They think of Him as One exercising an influence from a distance, rather than as One standing in near relationship. Jehoshaphat knew who it was that "*helped him,*" but the Syrian captains did not know who it was that "*moved them.*"]

Here we have the turning-point in this stage of Jehoshaphat's life. His eyes were opened to see the position into which he had brought himself; at least, he saw his danger, if he did not apprehend

the moral evil of his course. Encompassed by the captains of Syria, he could feel something of what it was to have taken Ahab's place. Happily for him, however, he could look up to the Lord from the depth of his distress, — he could cry out to Him in the time of his extremity; had it not been thus, the enemy's arrow, lodged deep in his heart, might have told out the sorrowful result of his ungodly association.

"Jehoshaphat cried out," and his cry came up before the Lord, whose ear is ever open to hear the cry of such as feel their need. "Peter went out and wept bitterly." The prodigal said, "I will arise, and go to my father;" and the father ran to meet him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. Thus is it that the blessed God ever meets those who, feeling that they have hewn out for themselves broken cisterns, which can hold no water, return to Him, the fountain of living waters. Would that all who feel that they have in any measure departed from Christ and slipped into the current of this present world might find their way back, in true humility and contrition of spirit, to Him who says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

How different Ahab's case! He, though carrying in His bosom a mortal wound, propped himself up in his chariot until the evening, fondly desiring to hide his weakness, and accomplish the object of his heart. We find no cry of humility, no tear of penitence, no looking upward. Ah, no; we find not any thing but what is in full keeping with his entire course. He died as he had lived — doing evil in the sight of the Lord. How fruitless were his efforts to prop himself up! Death had seized upon him; and though he struggled for a time to keep up an appearance, yet "about the time of the sun going down he died." Terrible end! — the end of one who had "sold himself to work wickedness." Who would be the votary of the world? Who that valued a life of simplicity and purity would mix himself up with its pursuits and habits? Who that valued a peaceful and happy termination of his career would link himself with its destinies?

Dear Christian reader, let us, with the Lord's help, endeavour to shake off the world's influence, and purge ourselves from its

ways. We have no idea how insidiously it creeps in upon us. The enemy at first weans from really simple and Christian habits, and by degrees we drop into the current of the world's thoughts. Oh that we may, with more holy jealousy and tenderness of conscience, watch against the approach of evil, lest the solemn statement of the prophet should apply to us, "Her Nazarites *were* purer than snow, they *were* whiter than milk, they *were* more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing *was* of sapphire: [but such is the sorrowful change, that] their visage *is* blacker than a coal, *they are not known in the streets*, their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick"!

We shall now look a little at 2 Chronicles 19. Here we see some blessed results from all that Jehoshaphat had passed through. "He returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem." Happy escape! The Lord's hand had interposed for him, and delivered him from the snare of the fowler, and, we may say, he would no doubt have his heart full of gratitude to Him who had so made him to differ from Ahab, though he had said, "I am as thou art." Ahab had gone down to his grave in shame and degradation, while Jehoshaphat returned to his house in peace. But what a lesson he had learned! How solemn to think of his having been so near the brink of the precipice! Yet the Lord had a controversy with him about what he had done. Though He allowed him to return in peace to Jerusalem, and did not suffer the enemy to hurt him, He would speak to his conscience about his sin; He would bring him aside from the field of battle, to deal with him in private. "And Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer, went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, 'Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.'" This was a solemn appeal, and it produced its own effect. Jehoshaphat "went out again through the people, from Beersheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the Lord God of their fathers." "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Thus did Peter; thus too did king Jehoshaphat; and blessed is it when lapses and failings lead, through the Lord's tender mercy, to such a result. Nothing but divine grace can ever produce this. When, after beholding Jehoshaphat surrounded by the Syrian captains (2

Chr. 18), we find him here going out through the length and breadth of the land to instruct his brethren in the fear of the Lord, we can only exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" But he was just the man for such a work. It is one who has felt in his own person the terrible fruits of a careless spirit that can most effectually say, "*Take heed what ye do.*" A restored Peter, who had himself denied the Holy One, was the chosen vessel to go and charge others with having done the same, and to offer them that precious blood which had cleansed his conscience from the guilt of it. So likewise the restored Jehoshaphat came from the battle of Ramoth-gilead to sound in the ears of his brethren with solemn emphasis, "Take heed what ye do." He that had just escaped from the snare could best tell what it was, and tell how to avoid it.

And mark the special feature in the Lord's character which engaged Jehoshaphat's attention: "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, *nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.*" Now his snare seems to have been the gift of Ahab: "Ahab slew sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead." He allowed his heart to be warmed by Ahab's gift, and was thereby the more easily swayed by Ahab's arguments. Just as Peter accepted the compliment of being let into the high-priest's fire, and, being warmed thereby, denied his Lord. We can never canvass, with spiritual coolness, the world's arguments and suggestions, while we are breathing its atmosphere, or accepting its compliments. We must keep outside and independent of it, and thus we shall find ourselves in a better position to reject its proposals, and triumph over its allurements.

But it is instructive to mark how Jehoshaphat, after his restoration, dwells upon that feature in the divine character from the lack of which he had so grievously failed. Communion with God is the great safeguard against all temptation; for there is no sin to which we are tempted, of which we cannot find the opposite in God; and we can only avoid evil by communion with good. This is a very simple but deeply practical truth. Had Jehoshaphat been in fellowship with God, he could not have sought fellowship with Ahab.

May we not say this is the only divine way in which to look at the question of worldly association. Let us ask ourselves, Can our association with the world go hand in hand with our fellowship with God? This is really the question. It is a miserable thing to ask, May I not partake of all the benefits of the name of Christ, and yet dishonour that name by mixing myself up with the people of the world, and taking common ground with them? How easily the matter is settled when we bring it into the divine presence, and under the searching power of the truth of God: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?" Truth strips off all the false covering which a heart out of communion is wont to throw around things. It is only when *it* casts its unerring beams on our path that we see things in their true character.

Mark the way in which divine truth exposed the actings of Ahab and Jezebel. Jezebel would fain put a fair cloak on her shocking wickedness: "Arise," said she, "and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive but dead." Such was her way of putting the matter. But how did the Lord view it? "Thus saith the Lord, 'Hast thou killed, and also taken possession'"(in other words, Hast thou committed murder and robbery?) God deals with realities. In His estimation, men and things get their proper place and value; there is no gilding, no affectation, no assumption — all is real. Just so was it with Jehoshaphat; his scheme which might in human estimation be regarded as a religious one, was in the divine judgement pronounced to be simply a helping of the ungodly, and loving them that hated the Lord. While men might applaud him, "there was wrath upon him from before the Lord."

However, Jehoshaphat had to be thankful for the salutary lesson which his fall had taught him; it had taught him to walk more in the fear of the Lord, and caused him to impress that more upon others also. This was doing not a little. True, it was a sad and painful way to learn; but it is well when we learn even by our falls; it is well when we can tell even by painful experience the terrible evil of being mixed up with the world. Would to God we all felt it more! Would that we more walked in the solemn apprehension of the defiling nature of all worldly association, and of our own tendency

to be defiled thereby! we should then be more efficient teachers of others! we should be able to say, with somewhat more weight, "Take heed what ye do;" and again, "Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good."

In 2 Chronicles 20 we find Jehoshaphat in far more healthful circumstances than in chap. 18. He is here seen under trial from the hand of the enemy: "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them others beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle." We are in far less apprehension for Jehoshaphat when we behold him the object of the enemy's hostilities than when we beheld him the subject of Ahab's kindness and hospitality. And very justly so; for in the one case he is about to be cast simply on the God of Israel, whereas in the other he was about to fall into the snare of Satan. The proper place for the man of God is to be in positive opposition to the enemies of the Lord, and not in conjunction with them.

We never can count upon divine sympathy or guidance when we join with the enemies of the Lord. Hence we observe what an empty thing it was of Jehoshaphat to ask counsel of the Lord in a matter which he knew to be wrong. Not so, however, in the scene before us. He is really in earnest when "he sets himself to seek the Lord, and proclaims a fast throughout all Judah." This is real work. There is nothing like trial from the hand of the world for driving the saint into a place of separation from it. When the world smiles, we are in danger of being attracted; but when it frowns, we are driven away from it into our stronghold; and this is both happy and healthful. Jehoshaphat did not say to a Moabite or an Ammonite, "I am as thou art." No; he knew well this was not so, for they would not let him think so. And how much better it is to know our true position in reference to the world!

There are three special points in Jehoshaphat's address to the Lord (verses 6-12).

1. The greatness of God.
2. The oath to Abraham about the land.

3. The attempt of the enemy to drive the seed of Abraham out of that land.

The prayer is most precious and instructive — full of divine intelligence. He makes it altogether a question between the God of Abraham and the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir. This is what faith ever does, and the issue will ever be the same. "They come," says he, "to cast us out of *Thy possession, which Thou hast given us to inherit.*" How simple! *They* would take what *Thou* hast given! This was putting it, as it were, upon God to maintain His own covenant. "O our God, *wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might* against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee." Surely, we may say, victory was already secured to one who could thus deal with God. And so Jehoshaphat felt. For "when he had consulted with the people, *he appointed singers unto the Lord*, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord: for His mercy endureth forever." Nothing but faith could raise a song of praise before even the battle had begun. "FAITH COUNTS THE PROMISE SURE." And as it had enabled Abraham to believe that God would put his seed into the possession of Canaan, so it enabled Jehoshaphat to believe that He would keep them therein, and he therefore did not need to wait for victory in order to praise; he already stood in the full results of victory. Faith could say, "Thou hast *guided* them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation," though they had but just entered upon the wilderness.

But what a strange sight it must have been for the enemies of Jehoshaphat, to see a band of men with musical instruments instead of weapons in their hands. It was something of the same principle of warfare as that adopted by Hezekiah afterward, when he clothed himself in sackcloth instead of armour (Isa. 37: 1).* Yes, it was the same, for both had been trained in the same school, and both fought under the same banner. Would that our warfare with the present age — with its habits, manners, and maxims — were more conducted on the same principle. "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."

{*"The proud king of Assyria was at the gates of Jerusalem with a mighty conquering host, and one would naturally expect to

find Hezekiah in the midst of his men of war, buckling on his armour, girding on his sword, mounting his chariot: but no; Hezekiah was different from most kings and captains — he had found out a place of strength which was quite unknown to Sennacherib — he had discovered a field of battle in which he could conquer without striking a blow. And mark the armour with which he girds himself: 'And it came to pass, when Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and *covered himself with sackcloth*, and went into the house of the Lord.' Here was the armour in which the king of Judah was about to cope with the king of Assyria. Strange armour — the armour of the sanctuary. What would Sennacherib have said had he seen this? He had never met such an antagonist before — he had never come in contact with a man who, instead of covering himself with a coat of mail, would cover himself with sackcloth; and instead of rushing forth into the field of battle in his chariot, would fall upon his knees in the temple. This would have appeared a novel mode of warfare in the eyes of the king of Assyria. He had met the kings of Hamath and Arphad, etc.; but if he had, it was upon his own principle, and in his own way; but he had never encountered such an antagonist as Hezekiah. In fact, what gave the latter such uncommon power in this contest was the feeling that *he* was nothing — that an 'arm of flesh' was of no avail; — in a word, that it was just Jehovah or nothing. This is specially seen in the act of spreading the letter before the Lord. Hezekiah was enabled by faith to retire out of the scene, and make it altogether a question between Jehovah and the king of Assyria. It was not Sennacherib and Hezekiah, but Sennacherib and Jehovah. This tells us the meaning of the sackcloth. Hezekiah felt himself to be utterly helpless, and he took the place of helplessness. He tells the Lord that the king of Assyria had reproached *Him*; he calls upon Him to vindicate His own glorious name, feeling assured that in so doing He would deliver His people. Mark, then, this wondrous scene. Repair to the sanctuary, and there behold one poor, weak, solitary man on his knees, pouring out his soul to Him who dwelt between the cherubim. No military preparations, no reviewing of troops: the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth. pass to and fro from Hezekiah to the prophet Isaiah: all is apparent weakness. On the other hand, see a mighty conqueror leading on a numerous army flushed with victory, eager for spoil. Surely, one might say, speaking after the manner of

men, all is over with Hezekiah and Jerusalem! Surely Sennacherib and his proud host will swallow up in a moment such a feeble band! And observe, further, the ground which Sennacherib takes in all this (Isa. 36: 4-7). Here we observe that Sennacherib makes the very reformation which Hezekiah had effected a ground of reproach; thus leaving him as he vainly thought, no resting-place or foundation for his confidence. Again, he says, 'Am I come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? *The Lord said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.*' (v. 10) This was indeed putting Hezekiah's faith to the test: faith must pass through the furnace. It will not do to *say* that we trust in the Lord; we must *prove* that we do, and that too when every thing apparently is the king's bearing in the eyes of the people; yea, rather, such is ever the bearing of faith

calm, self-possessed, dignified, in the presence of man; while, at the same time, ready to sink into the very dust in self-abasement in the presence of God. The man of faith can say to his fellow, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God!' and, at the same moment, send up to God the cry of conscious weakness. (See Ex. 14: 13-15.) So it was with the king of Judah at this solemn and trying crisis. Harken to him while, in the retirement of the sanctuary, shut in with God, he pours out the anxieties of his soul in the ear of One who was willing to hear and ready to help (Isa. 37: 15-20)." — *Practical Reflections on the Life and Times of Hezekiah*]

What a contrast between Jehoshaphat personating Ahab at Ramoth-gilead, and standing with the Lord against his enemies the Moabites! Yes, what a contrast, in every particular! His mode of seeking help and guidance of the Lord was different, his mode of proceeding to battle was different; and oh, how different too the end! Instead of being well-nigh overwhelmed by the enemy, and crying out in the depth of his distress and danger, we find him joining in a loud chorus of praise to the God of his fathers, who had given him a victory without his striking a blow, who had made his enemies destroy one another, and who had graciously conducted him from the dark valley of Achor into the valley of Berachah. Blessed contrast! May it lead us to seek a more decided path of separation, and of abiding dependence on the Lord's grace and faithfulness. The valley of Berachah, or praise, is ever the place into

which the Spirit of God would conduct; but He cannot lead us thither when we join ourselves with the "Ahabs" of this world, for the purpose of carrying out their schemes. The word is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6: 17-18).

It is wonderful how worldliness hinders, yea, rather destroys, a spirit of praise; it is positively hostile to such a spirit, and, if indulged in, it will either lead to deep anguish of soul, or to the most thorough and open abandonment of all semblance of godliness. In Jehoshaphat's case, it was happily the former. He was humbled, restored, and led into larger blessedness.

But it would be sad indeed were any one to plunge into worldliness with the hope that it might lead to an issue similar to that of Jehoshaphat. Vain, presumptuous hope! Sinful expectation! Who that valued a pure, calm, and peaceful walk could for a moment entertain it? "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation," but shall we, on that account, go and deliberately plunge ourselves into it? God forbid!

Yet, ah! who can sound the depths of the human heart — its profound, malignant depths? Who can disentangle its complicated mazes? Could any one imagine that Jehoshaphat would again, after such solemn lessons, join himself with the ungodly, to further their ambitious, or rather their avaricious, schemes? No one could imagine it, save one who had learned something of his own heart. Yet so he did. "He joined himself with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who did very wickedly. And he joined himself with him, to make ships to go to Tarshish; and they made the ships in Ezion-gaber. Then Eliezer, the son of Dodavah of Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, 'Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works.' And the ships were broken, and they were not able to go to Tarshish" (verses 35-37). What is man! A poor, stumbling, failing, halting creature; ever rushing into some new folly or evil. Jehoshaphat had, as it were, but just recovered from the effects of his association with Ahab, and he forthwith joins himself with Ahaziah. He had with difficulty, or rather through the

special and most gracious interference of the Lord, escaped from the arrows of the Syrians, and again we find him in league with the kings of Israel and Edom, to fight against the Moabites.

Such was Jehoshaphat — such his extraordinary course. There were some "good things found in him"; but his snare was, worldly association; and the lesson which we learn from the consideration of his history is, to beware of that evil. Yes; we would need to have sounded in our ears, with ceaseless solemnity, the words, "*Come out, and be separate.*" We cannot, by any possibility, mix ourselves up with the world, and allow ourselves to be governed and led by its maxims and principles, without suffering in our own souls, and marring our testimony.

I would only remark, in conclusion, that it seems like a relief to the spirit to read the words, "Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers" (2 Chr. 21: 1), as we feel assured, that he has at last got beyond the reach of the enemy's snares and devices; and further, that he comes under the Spirit's benediction, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours — yes, a rest from their conflicts, snares, and temptations also.

2 Chronicles 20

The Living God and a Living Faith.

There is one great substantial fact standing prominently forth on every page of the volume of God, and illustrated in every stage of the history of God's people — a fact of immense weight and moral power at all times, but specially in seasons of darkness, difficulty, and discouragement, occasioned by the low condition of things among those who profess to be on the Lord's side. The fact is this, *That faith can always count on God, and God will always answer faith.*

Such is our fact, such our thesis; and if the reader will turn with us, for a few moments, to 2 Chronicles 20, he will find a very beautiful and very striking illustration.

This chapter shows us the good king Jehoshaphat under very heavy pressure indeed — it records a dark moment in his history. "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other besides the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then" (for people are ever quick to run with evil tidings) "there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea, on this side Syria."

Here was a difficulty of no ordinary nature. This invading host was made up of the descendants of Lot and of Esau; and this fact might give rise to a thousand conflicting thoughts and distracting questions in the mind of Jehoshaphat. They were not Egyptians or Assyrians, concerning whom there could be no question whatever; but both Esau and Lot stood in certain relations to Israel, and a question might suggest itself as to how far such relations were to be recognized.

Not this only. The practical state of the entire nation of Israel — the actual condition of God's people, was such as to give rise to the most serious misgivings. Israel no longer presented an unbroken front to the invading foe. Their visible unity was gone. A grievous breach had been made in their battlements. The ten tribes and the two

were rent asunder, the one from the other. The condition of the former was terrible, and that of the latter, shaky enough.

Thus the circumstances of king Jehoshaphat were dark and discouraging in the extreme; and, even as regards himself and his practical course, he was but just emerging from the consequences of a very humiliating fall, so that his reminiscences would be quite as cheerless as his surroundings.

But it is just here that our grand substantial fact presents itself to the vision of faith, and flings a mantle of light over the whole scene. Things looked gloomy, no doubt; but God was to be counted upon by faith, and faith could count upon Him. God is a never failing resource — a great reality, at all times, and under all circumstances. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the stream whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46: 1-7).

Here, then, was Jehoshaphat's resource in the day of his trouble; and to it he at once betook himself, in that earnest faith which never fails to draw down power and blessing from the living and true God, to meet every exigency of the way. "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and claimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord; even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not Thou God in heaven? and rulest not Thou over all the Kingdoms of the heathen? and in Thy hand is There not power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee? Art not Thou our God who didst drive out the inhabitants of

this land before Thy people Israel, and gavest it *to the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever?*"

These are the breathings of faith — faith that enables the soul to take the very highest possible ground. It mattered not what unsettled questions there might be between Esau and Jacob; there were none between Abraham and the Almighty God. Now, God had given the land to Abraham, His friend. For how long *For ever*. This was enough. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." God will never cancel His call, or take back a gift. This is a fixed foundation principle; and on this faith always takes its stand with firm decision.

The enemy might throw in a thousand suggestions; and the poor heart might throw up a thousand reasonings. It might seem like presumption and empty conceit, on the part of Jehoshaphat, to plant his foot on such lofty ground. It was all well enough in the days of David, or of Solomon, or of Joshua, when the unity of the nation was unbroken, and the banner of Jehovah floated in triumph over the twelve tribes of Israel. But things were sadly changed; and it ill became one in Jehoshaphat's circumstances to use such lofty language or assume to occupy such a high position.

What is faith's reply to all this? A very simple but a very powerful one — God never changes. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Had He not made Abraham a present of the land of Canaan? Had He not bestowed it upon his seed forever? Had He not ratified the gift by His word and His oath — these two immutable things in which it was impossible for Him to lie? Unquestionably.

But then what of the law? Did not that make some difference? None whatever, as regards God's gift and promise. Four centuries previous to the giving of the law, was the great transaction settled and stablished between the Almighty God and Abraham His friend — and settled and stablished forever. Hence nothing can possibly touch this. There were no legal conditions proposed to Abraham. All was pure and absolute grace. God gave the land to Abraham by promise, and not by law, in any shape or form.

Now, it was on this original ground that Jehoshaphat took his stand; and he was right. It was the only thing for him to do. He had not one hair's breadth of solid standing ground, short of these golden words, "Thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend forever." It was either this or nothing. *A living faith always lays hold on the living God.* It cannot stop short of Him. It looks not at men or their circumstances. It takes no account of the changes and chances of this mortal life. It lives and moves and has its being in the presence of the living God; it rejoices in the cloudless sunlight of His blessed countenance. It carries on all its artless reasonings in the sanctuary, and draws all its happy conclusions from the facts discovered there. It does not lower the standard according to the condition of things around, but boldly and decidedly takes up its position on the very highest ground.

Now, these actings of faith are always most grateful to the heart of God. The living God delights in a living faith. We may be quite sure that the bolder the grasp of faith, the more welcome it is to God. We need never suppose that the blessed One is either gratified or glorified by the workings of a legal mind. No; He delights to be trusted without a shadow of reserve or misgiving. He delights to be fully counted upon and largely used; and the deeper the need, and the darker the surrounding gloom, the more is He glorified by the faith that draws upon Him.

Hence, we may assert with perfect confidence, that the attitude and the utterances of Jehoshaphat, in the scene before us, were in full accordance with the mind of God. There is something perfectly beautiful to see him, as it were, opening the original lease, and laying his finger on that clause in virtue of which Israel held as tenants forever under God. Nothing could cancel that clause or break that lease. No flaw there. All was ordered and sure. "Thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend *for ever.*"

This was solid ground — the ground of God — the ground of faith, which no power of the enemy can ever shake. True, the enemy might remind Jehoshaphat of sin and folly, failure and unfaithfulness. Nay, he might suggest to him that the very fact of the threatened invasion proved that Israel had fallen, for had they not done so, there would be neither enemy nor evil.

But for this, too, grace had provided an answer — an answer which faith knew well how to appropriate. Jehoshaphat reminds Jehovah of the house which Solomon had built to His name. "They have built Thee a sanctuary therein for Thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us, as a sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in Thy presence (for Thy name is in this house), and cry unto Thee in our affliction, then Thou wilt hear and help. and now, behold, the children of Ammon, and Moab, and mount Seir, whom Thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not. Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of *Thy possession, which Thou hast given us to inherit*. O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do, but *our eyes are upon Thee*" (vers. 8-12).

Here, truly, is a living faith dealing with the living God. It is no mere empty profession — no lifeless creed — no cold uninfluential theory. It is not a man "saying he has faith." Such things will never stand in the day of battle. They may do well enough when all is calm, smooth, and bright; but when difficulties have to be grappled with — when the enemy has to be met face to face, all merely nominal faith, all mere lip profession, will prove like autumn leaves before the blast. Nothing will stand the test of actual conflict but a living personal faith in a living personal Saviour God. This is what is needed. It is this which alone can sustain the heart, come what may. Faith brings God into the scene, and all is strength, victory, and perfect peace.

Thus it was with the king of Judah, in the days of 2 Chr. 20. "We have no might; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee." This is the way to occupy God's ground, even with the eyes fixed on God Himself. This is the true secret of stability and peace. The devil will leave no stone unturned to drive us off the true ground which, as Christians, we ought to occupy in these last days; and we, in ourselves, have no might whatever against him. Our only resource is in the living God. If our eyes are upon Him, nothing can harm us. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

Art thou on God's ground? Canst thou give a "Thus saith the Lord" for the position which thou occupiest, at this moment? Art thou consciously standing on the solid ground of holy Scripture? Is there anything questionable in thy surroundings and associations? We beseech thee to weigh these questions solemnly as in the divine presence. Be assured they are of moment just now. We are passing through critical moments. Men are taking sides; principles are working and coming to a head. Never was it more needful to be thoroughly and unmistakably on the Lord's side.

Jehoshaphat never could have met the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, had he not been persuaded that his feet were on the very ground which God had given to Abraham. If the enemy could have shaken his confidence as to this, he would have had an easy victory. But Jehoshaphat knew where he was; he knew his ground. He understood his bearings; and therefore he could fix his eyes with confidence upon the living God. He had no misgivings as to his position. He did not say, as many do, now-a-days, "I am not quite sure. I hope I am; but sometimes clouds come over my soul, and make me hesitate as to whether I am really on divine ground."

Ah! no, the king of Judah would not have understood such language at all. All was clear to him. His eye rested on the original grant. He felt sure he was on the true ground of the Israel of God; and albeit all Israel were not there with him, yet God was with him, and that was enough — His was a living faith in the living God — the only thing that will stand in the day of trial.

There is something in the attitude and utterance of the king of Judah, on that memorable occasion, well worthy of the reader's profound attention. His feet were firmly fixed on God's ground, and his eyes as firmly fixed on God Himself; and in addition to this, there was the deep sense of his own thorough nothingness. He had not so much as a shadow of a doubt as to the fact of his being in possession of the very inheritance which God had given him. He knew that he was in his right place. He did not *hope* it; still less did he doubt it; no, he knew it. He could say, "I believe and am sure."

This is all-important. It is impossible to stand against the enemy, if there is anything equivocal in our position. If there be any

secret misgiving as to our being in our right place — if we cannot give a "Thus saith the Lord" for the position which we occupy, the path we tread, the associations in which we stand, the work in which we are engaged, there will, most assuredly, be weakness in the hour of conflict. Satan is sure to avail himself of the smallest misgiving in the soul. All must be settled as to our positive standing if we would make any headway against the enemy. There must be an unclouded confidence as to our real position before God, else the foe will have an easy victory.

Now, it is precisely here that there is so much weakness apparent among the children of God. Very few, comparatively, are clear, Sound, and settled as to their foundation — very few are able, without any reserve, to take the blessed ground of being washed in the blood of Jesus, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. At times they hope it. When things go well with them; when they have had a good time in the closet; when they have enjoyed nearness to God in prayer, or over the Word; while they are sitting under a clear, fervent, forcible ministry — at such moments, perhaps, they can venture to speak hopefully about themselves.

But, very soon, dark clouds gather; they feel the workings of indwelling sin; they are afflicted with wandering thoughts; or it may be, they have been betrayed into some levity of spirit, or irritability of temper; then they begin to reason about themselves, and to question whether they are, in reality, the children of God. And from reasonings and questionings, they very speedily slip into positive unbelief, and then plunge into the thick gloom of a despondency bordering on despair.

All this is most sad. It is, at once, dishonouring to God, and destructive to the soul's peace; and as to progress, in such a condition, it is wholly out of the question. How can any one run a race, if he has not cleared the starting post? How can he erect a building, if he has not laid the foundation? And, on the same principle, how can a soul grow in the divine life, if he is always liable to doubt whether he has that life or not?

But it may be that some of our readers are disposed to put such a question as the following, "How can I be sure that I am on God's

ground? — that I am washed in the blood of Jesus and sealed with the Holy Spirit?" We reply, How do you know that you are a lost sinner? Is it because you feel it? Is mere feeling the ground of your faith? If so, it is not a divine faith at all. True faith rests only on the testimony of holy Scripture.

No doubt, it is by the gracious energy of the Holy Ghost that any one can exercise this living faith; but we are speaking now of the true ground of faith — the authority — the basis on which it rests, and that is simply the holy Scriptures which, as the inspired apostle tells us, are able to make us wise unto salvation, and which even a child could know, without the church, the clergy, the fathers, the doctors, the councils, the colleges, or any other human intervention whatsoever.

"Abraham believed God." Here was divine faith. It was not a question of feeling. Indeed, if Abraham had been influenced by his feelings, he would have been a doubter instead of a believer. For what had he to build upon in himself? "His own body now dead." A poor ground surely on which to build his faith in the promise of an innumerable seed. But, we are told, "He considered not his own body now dead" (Rom. 4). What, then, did he consider? He considered the word of the living God, and on that he rested. Now this is faith. And mark what the apostle says: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief" (for unbelief is always a staggerer), "but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

"Ah! but," the anxious reader may say, "what has all this to say to my case? I am not an Abraham — I cannot expect a special revelation from God. How am I to know that God has spoken to me? How can I possess this precious faith?" Well, dear friend, mark the apostle's further statement. "Now," he adds, "it was not written for his [Abraham's] sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if" — if what? — if we feel, realize, or experience aught in ourselves? Nay, but "if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

All this is full of solid comfort and richest consolation. It assures the anxious inquirer that he has the self same ground and authority to rest upon that Abraham had, with an immensely higher measure of light thrown on that ground, inasmuch as Abraham was called to believe in a promise, whereas we are privileged to believe in an accomplished fact. He was called to look forward to something which was to be done; we look back at something that is done, even an accomplished redemption, attested by the fact of a risen and glorified Saviour, at the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens.

But as to the ground or authority on which we are called to rest our souls, it is the same in our case as in Abraham's and all true believers' in all ages — it is the Word of God — the holy Scriptures. There is no other foundation of faith but this; and the faith that rests on any other is not true faith at all. A faith resting on human tradition — on the authority of the Church — on the authority of so-called general councils — on the clergy — or on learned men, is not divine faith, but mere superstition; it is a faith which "stands in the wisdom of men," and "not in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2: 5).

Now, it is utterly impossible for any human pen or mortal tongue to overstate the value or importance of this grand principle — this principle of a living faith. Its value at the present moment is positively unspeakable. We believe it to be the divine antidote against most, if not all, the leading errors, evils, and hostile influences of the day in which our lot is cast. There is a tremendous shaking going on around us. Minds are agitated. Disturbing forces are abroad. There is a loosening of the foundations. Old institutions, to which the human mind clings, as the ivy to the oak, are tottering on every side; and many are actually fallen: and thousands of souls that have been finding shelter in them are dislodged and scared, and know not whither to turn. Some are saying, "The bricks are thrown down, but we will build with hewn stone." Many are at their wit's end, and most are ill at ease.

Nor is this all; there is a numerous class, for the most part, of those who are not so much concerned about the condition and destiny of religious institutions and ecclesiastical systems, as about the condition and destiny of their own precious souls — of those who are not so much agitated by questions about "broad church,"

"high church," "low church," "state church," or "free church," as about this one great question, "What must I do to be saved?" What have we to say to these latter? What is the real want of their souls? Simply this, "A living faith in the living God." This is what is needed for all who are disturbed by what they see without, or feel within. Our unfailing resource is in the living God and in His Son Jesus Christ, as revealed by the Holy Spirit in the holy Scriptures.

Here is the true resting-place of faith, and to this we do, most earnestly, most urgently and solemnly, invite the anxious reader. In one word, we entreat him to stay his whole soul on the Word of God — the holy Scriptures — Here we have authority for all that we need to know, to believe, or to do.

Is it a question of anxiety about my eternal salvation? Hear the following words, Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in *Zion for a foundation*, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, *a sure foundation*: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28: 16). These precious words, so pregnant with tranquillising power, are quoted by the inspired apostle in the New Testament Scriptures: "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and *he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded*" (1 Peter 2: 6).

What solid comfort — what deep and settled repose for the anxious soul is here! God has laid the foundation, and that foundation is nothing less than His own eternal and co-equal Son, the Son who had dwelt from all eternity in His bosom. This foundation is, in every respect, adequate to sustain the whole weight of the counsels and purposes of the eternal THREE IN ONE — to meet all the claims of the nature, the character, and the throne of God.

Being all this, it must needs be fully adequate to meet all the need of the anxious soul, of what kind soever that need may be. If Christ is enough for God He must of necessity be enough for man — for any man — for the reader; and that He is enough is proved by the very passage just quoted. He is God's own foundation, laid by His own hand, the foundation and centre of that glorious system of royal and victorious grace set forth in the word "Zion." (See Heb.

12: 22-24.) He is God's own precious, tried, chief corner stone — that blessed One who went down into death's dark waters — bore the heavy judgement and wrath Of God against sin — robbed death of its sting, and the grave of its victory — destroyed him that had the power of death — wrested from the enemy's grasp that terrible weapon with which sin had armed him, and made it the very instrument of his eternal defeat and confusion. Having done all this, He was received up into glory, and seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

Such is God's foundation, to which He graciously calls the attention of every one who really feels the need of something divinely solid on which to build, in view of the hollow and shadowy scenes of this world, and in prospect of the stern realities of eternity. Dear reader, you are now invited to build upon this foundation. Be assured it is for you as positively and distinctly as though you heard a voice from Heaven speaking to your own very self. The word of the living God is addressed "to every creature under heaven" — "whosoever will" is invited to come.

The inspired volume has been placed in your hand and laid open before your eyes; and for what think you? Is it to mock or to tantalise you by presenting before you what was never intended for you? Ah! no; such is not God's way. Does He send His sunlight and showers to mock and to tantalise, or to gladden and refresh? Do you ever think of calling in question your own very personal welcome to study the book of Creation? Never; and yet there might be some show of foundation of such a question, inasmuch as, since that wondrous volume was thrown open, sin has entered and thrown its dark blots over the pages thereof.

But, spite of sin and all its forms and all its consequences, spite of Satan's power and malice, God has spoken. He has caused His voice to be heard in this dark and sinful world. And what has He said? "Behold, I lay in Zion a foundation." This is something entirely new. It is as though our blessed, loving, and ever gracious God had said to us, "Here, I have begun on the new. I have laid a foundation, on the ground of redemption, which nothing can ever touch, neither sin, or Satan, or aught else. I lay the foundation, and pledge My word that whosoever believes — whosoever commits

himself, in childlike, unquestioning confidence, to My foundation — whosoever rests in My Christ — whosoever is satisfied with My precious, tried, chief corner stone, shall never — no, never — no, never be confounded — never be put to shame — never be disappointed — shall never perish, world without end."

Beloved reader, dost thou still hesitate? We solemnly avow we cannot see even the shadow of a foundation of a reason why thou shouldest. If there were any question raised, or any condition proposed, or any barrier erected, reason would that thou mightest hesitate. If there were so much as a single preliminary to be settled by thee — if it were made a question of feeling or of experience, or of aught else that thou couldst do, or feel, or be, then verily thou mightest justly pause. But there is absolutely nothing of the sort. There is the Christ of God and the Word of God, and — what then? "He that believeth shall not be confounded."

In short, it is simply "A living faith in the living God." It is taking God at His word. It is believing what He says because He says it. It is committing your soul to the word of Him who cannot lie. It is doing what Abraham did when he believed God and was counted righteous. It is doing what Jehoshaphat did when he planted his foot firmly on those immortal words, "Thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend, forever." It is doing what the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the saints in all ages have done, when they rested their souls for time and eternity upon that Word which "is settled forever in heaven," and thus lived in peace and died in hope of a glorious resurrection. It is resting calmly and sweetly on the immovable rock of holy Scripture, and thus proving the divine and sustaining virtue of that which has never failed any who trusted it, and never will, and never can.

Oh! the unspeakable blessedness of having such a foundation in a world like this where death, decay, and change are stamped upon all; where friendship's fondest links are snapped in the twinkling of an eye by death's rude hand; where all that seems, to nature's view, most stable, is liable to be swept away in a moment by the rushing tide of popular revolution; where there is absolutely nothing on which the heart can lean, and say, "I have now found

permanent repose." What a mercy, in such a scene, to have "A living faith in the living God."

"They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me." Such is the veritable record of the living God — a record made good in the experience of all those who have been enabled, through grace, to exercise a living faith. But then we must remember how much is involved in those three words, "wait for Me." The waiting must be a real thing. It will not do to say we are waiting on God, when, in reality, our eye is askance upon some human prop or creature confidence. We must be absolutely "shut up" to God. We must be brought to the end of self, and to the bottom of circumstances, in order fully to prove what the life of faith is, and what God's resources are. God and the creature can never occupy the same platform. It must be God alone. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation" (Ps. 62: 5-6).

Thus it was with Jehoshaphat, in that scene recorded in 2 Chr. 20. He was wholly cast upon God. It was either God or nothing. "We have no might." But what then? "Our eyes are upon Thee." This was enough. It was well for Jehoshaphat not to have so much as a single atom of might — a single ray of knowledge. He was in the very best possible attitude and condition to prove what God was. It would have been an incalculable loss to him to have been possessed of the very smallest particle of creature strength or creature wisdom, inasmuch as it could only have proved a hindrance to him in leaning exclusively upon the arm and the counsel of the Almighty God. If the eye of faith rests upon the living God — if He fills the entire range of the soul's vision, then what do we want with might or knowledge of our own? Who would think of resting in that which is human when he can have that which is divine? Who would lean on an arm of flesh, when he can lean on the arm of the living God?

Art thou, at this moment in any pressure, in any trial, need, or difficulty? If so, let us entreat thee to look simply and solely to the living God. Turn away thine eyes completely from the creature: "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Let thy faith take bold now on the strength of God Himself. Put thy whole case into

His omnipotent hand. Cast thy burden, whatever it is, upon Him. Let there be no reserve. He is as willing as He is able, and as able as He is willing, to bear all. Only trust Him fully. He loves to be trusted — loves to be used. It is His joy, blessed be His name, to yield a ready and a full response to the appeal of faith. It is worth having a burden, to know the blessedness of rolling it over upon Him. So the king of Judah found it in the day of his trial, and so shall the reader find it now. God never fails a trusting heart. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me." Precious words! Let us mark how they are illustrated in the narrative before us.

No sooner had Jehoshaphat cast himself completely upon the Lord, than the divine response fell, with clearness and power, upon his ear. "Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat; thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid or dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's...ye shall not need to fight in this battle. Set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to-morrow go out against them; for the Lord will be with you."

What an answer! "The battle is not yours, but God's." Only think of God's having a battle with people! Assuredly there could be little question as to the issue of such a battle. Jehoshaphat had put the whole matter into God's hands, and God took it up and made it entirely His own. It is always thus. Faith puts the difficulty, the trial, and the burden into God's hands, and leaves Him to act. This is enough God never refuses to respond to the appeal of faith; nay, it is His delight to answer it. Jehoshaphat had made it a question between God and the enemy. He had said, "They have come to cast us out of Thy possession, which Thou hast given us to inherit."

Nothing could be simpler. God had given Israel the land, and He could keep them in it, spite of ten thousand foes. Thus faith would reason. The self-same Hand that had placed them in the land could keep them there. It was simply a question of divine power. "O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee."

It is a wonderful point in the history of any soul, to be brought to say, "I have no might." It is the sure precursor of divine deliverance. The moment a man is brought to the discovery of his utter powerlessness, the divine word is, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." One does not want "might" to "stand still." It needs no effort to "see the salvation of God." This holds good in reference to the sinner in coming to Christ, at the first; and it holds equally good in reference to the Christian in his whole career from first to last. The great difficulty is to get to the end of our own strength. Once there, the whole thing is settled.

There may be a vast amount of struggle and exercise ere we are brought to say "without strength!" But, the moment we take that ground, the word is, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." Human effort, in every shape and form, can but raise a barrier between our souls and God's salvation. If God has undertaken for us, we may well be still. And has He not? Yes, blessed be His holy name, He has charged Himself with all that concerns us, for time and eternity; and hence we have only to let Him act for us, in all things. It is our happy privilege to let Him go before us, while we follow on "in wonder, love, and praise."

Thus it was in that interesting and instructive scene on which we have been dwelling. "Jehoshaphat bowed his head, with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high."

Here we have the true attitude and the proper occupation of the believer. Jehoshaphat withdrew his eyes from "that great company that had come against him," and fixed them upon the living God. Jehovah had come right in and placed Himself between His people and the enemy, just as He had done in the day of the exodus, at the Red Sea, so that instead of looking at the difficulties, they might look at Him.

This, beloved reader, is the secret of victory at all times, and under all circumstances. This it is which fills the heart with praise and thanksgiving, and bows the head in wondering worship. There is

something perfectly beautiful in the entire bearing of Jehoshaphat and the congregation, on the occasion before us. They were evidently impressed with the thought that they had nothing to do but to praise God. And they were right. Had He not said to them, "Ye shall not need to fight"? What then had they to do? What remained for them? Nothing but praise. Jehovah was going out before them to fight; and they had but to follow after Him in adoring worship.

"And they rose early in the morning, and went forth in the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chr. 20: 20).

It is of the very last importance that God's Word should ever have its own supreme place in the heart of the Christian. God has spoken. He has given us His Word; and it is for us to lean unshaken thereon. We want nothing more. The divine Word is amply sufficient to give confidence, peace, and stability to the soul. We do not need evidences from man to prove the truth of God's Word. That Word carries its own powerful evidences with it. To suppose that we require human testimony to prove that God's Word is true, is to imply that man's word is more valid, more trustworthy, more authoritative, than the Word of God. If we need a human voice to interpret, to ratify, to make God's revelation available, then we are virtually deprived of that revelation altogether.

We call the special attention of the reader to this point. It concerns the integrity of Holy Scripture. The grand question is this, Is God's Word sufficient or not? Do we really want man's authority to make us sure that God has spoken? Far be the thought! This would be placing man's word above God's Word, and thus depriving us of the only solid ground on which our souls can lean.

This is precisely what the devil has been aiming at from the very beginning, and it is what he is aiming at now. He wants to remove from beneath our feet the solid rock of divine revelation, and to give us instead the sandy foundation of human authority. Hence it is that we do so earnestly press upon our readers the urgent need of keeping close to God's Word, in simple unquestioning faith.

It is really the true secret of stability and peace. If God's Word be not enough for us, without man's interference, we are positively left without any sure basis of our soul's confidence; yea, we are cast adrift on the wild watery waste of scepticism, we are plunged in doubt and dark uncertainty: we are most miserable.

But, thanks and praise be to God, it is not so. "*Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established: believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper.*" Here is the resting-place of faith in all ages. God's eternal Word, which is settled for ever in Heaven, which He has magnified according to all His name, and which stands forth in its own divine dignity and sufficiency before the eye of faith. We must utterly reject the idea that aught in the way of human authority, human evidences, or human feelings, is needful to make the testimony of God full weight in the balances of the soul.

Grant us but this, that God has spoken, and we argue with bold decision that nothing more is needed as a foundation for genuine faith. In a word, if we want to be established and to prosper, we have simply to "Believe in the Lord our God." It was this that enabled Jehoshaphat to bow his head in holy worship. It was this that enabled him to praise God for victory ere a single blow was struck. It was this that conducted him into "the valley of (blessing) and surrounded him with spoil more than he could carry away.

And now we have the soul-stirring record: "And when he had consulted with the people, *he appointed singers unto the Lord*, and that Should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord: for His mercy forever." What a strange advance guard for an army! a company of singers! Such is faith's way of ordering the battle.

"And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah, and they were smitten." Only think of the Lord setting ambushments! Think of His engaging if in the business of military tactics! How wonderful! God will do any thing that His people need, if only His people will confide in Him and leave themselves and their affairs absolutely in His hand.

"And when Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped." Such was the end of "that great company" — that formidable host — that terrible foe. All vanished away before the presence of the God of Israel. Yes, and had they been a million times more numerous, and more formidable, the issue would have been the same, for circumstances are nothing to the living God, and nothing to a living faith. When God fills the vision of the soul difficulties fade away, and songs of praise break forth from joyful lips.

"And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them" (for that was all they had to do) "they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much. And on the fourth day, they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the Lord."

Such, beloved reader, must ever be the result of a living faith in the living God. More than two thousand five hundred years have rolled away since the occurrence of the event on which we have been dwelling; but the record is as fresh as ever. No change has come over the living God, or over the living faith which ever takes hold of His strength, and counts on His faithfulness. It is as true to-day as it was in the day of Jehoshaphat, that those who believe in the Lord our God shall be established, and shall prosper. They shall be endowed with strength, crowned with victory, clothed with spoils, and filled with songs of praise. May we, then, through the gracious energy of the Holy Spirit, ever be enabled to exercise "A LIVING FAITH IN THE LIVING GOD!"

2 Chronicles 29 - 32 and Isaiah 36 - 39.

Work in its Right Place;

or, Reflections on the Life and Times of Hezekiah.

There are two things to be specially guarded against by the Christian, viz., *inactivity* on the one hand, and ill-timed *Service* on the other. The former is a thing quite incompatible with the Christian character; the very same grace that makes us ashamed of our poor mean services, sends us on our way in earnest desire to be still more largely used for God. It is a truly lamentable thing when we need to be exhorted not to be idle. The Christian should find it as natural to him to act for God as it is for the natural man to perform the functions of natural life; hence, if he be not found *acting*, he has much reason to doubt as to his *living*. There *is* such a thing as "a name to *live*;" but no such thing as a name to *act*; i.e. to act for God.

On the other hand, we must ever bear in mind that God will be no man's debtor, seeing "He *giveth* to all life and breath and all things." (Acts 17: 25.) Man's constant effort is to make God his debtor; but it is a truly fruitless effort; and he who persists therein will find himself at issue with God. Nothing can ever settle the question between God and man, save man's becoming the recipient and the debtor; until this is done man must remain at a distance from God

Now, it is rather with the second point above referred to that I have to do in this paper Service ill-timed or defective, because not being the direct result of communion, contrasted with service flowing out of communion will be my theme — a theme with which the life and times of Hezekiah do specially furnish me

There are three kings of Judah whose reigns have been linked together by the Holy Ghost in three of the Prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah delivered their prophetic burden "in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" There is, I feel, a marked moral connection between the three reigns — a connection for which we might naturally be led to look from the fact just stated.

The temple of Jerusalem was the grand centre or gathering point for the people of Israel of old; round that sacred edifice the affections of every righteous Jew were entwined; and, as regards the kings of Judah, it will be observed that their actings with reference to the temple may be regarded as a safe criterion by which to judge of their real character personally and officially. Those amongst the kings of whom this happy testimony could be borne, "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," were generally such as had their hearts exercised about the temple and worship of the God of Israel; and, on the other hand, those who "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" were such as had abandoned the house of the Lord and addicted themselves to idolatry.

Jotham, king of Judah, occupied a position midway between these two classes; he was not an idolater; and yet the house of the Lord did not occupy that place in his thoughts to which it was entitled. Of him it may be said that he began his work *outside the Sanctuary* — he went out to the mountains to build ere he had gone into the sanctuary to worship — he stood in the battlefield, ere he had stood at the altar — he addressed himself to the masons and the men of war, ere he had addressed himself to the priests — the ministers of the Sanctuary. Hence all was defective. True, he did much — "he built castles and towers" — he even went so far as to "build the high gate of the temple of the Lord" — yea, "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." Yet, notwithstanding all this, there was a "howbeit" — "the high places here not removed, the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places" (Compare 2 Kings 15: 35, 2 Chr 27: 2). This is a profitable lesson for us. We should watch with great strictness over the state of our hearts, lest haply our very services — our right and reasonable services — should get between our souls and the Person of Christ. We should frequently turn aside for the purpose of sifting our motives in what we do — when we preach, publish, correspond, visit, or do anything else, we should calmly sit in judgement on ourselves as to our secret purposes in all these things. When the Lord comes it is the "counsels of the heart" — not the works of the hand merely — that "He will make manifest." This is very solemn. Many a showy act of service — many an eloquent sermon — many a well written book — many an ostentatious visit will sink into eternal

oblivion; or, if remembered, tend only to smite the conscience and blacken the doom of the deluded soul, who, it may be, had gone to work without having experimentally known that fundamental law of God's house, namely, *man must be a beggar*; in other words, who had never any higher object than *self* in all he said and did.

Concerning Ahaz we need not say much. He was an open opposer of God and His truth. He neglected the temple — shut up the doors — put out the lamps — cut up the vessels, and erected idolatrous altars in every corner of Jerusalem. Moreover, he went to Damascus to meet the king of Assyria, and there he saw an altar of which he sent a pattern to Urijah, the priest, who made one like unto it at Jerusalem; thus he put the true altar out of its place, and in a word, subverted the whole order of worship. "This is that king Ahaz."

In whatever way we view this unhappy man his history *is* full of solemn warning to us; but particularly when we view him as coming after Jotham. Whenever our hearts are not devoted fully and primarily to the service of the sanctuary — when we do not prize and cultivate secret communion with God — when the work *within* does not keep pace with the work *without* — when we read and teach more than we pray — when our work is more before the eye of man than the eye of God, we may rest assured of it, we shall soon break down altogether. The only thing that can maintain us in genuine effective service is communion, and if we fail in this all must go wrong. Thus, looking at these two reigns as morally connected, the open apostasy of Ahaz was what we might have looked for after the defective service of Jotham. If we are merely engaged in building upon the mountains, while the temple lies comparatively neglected, we shall soon be found turning our backs altogether on the true worship of God, and giving ourselves up to idolatry. Surely we may ask, what avail "castles and towers," while the doors of the Lord's house are shut up? Or victories over the Ammonites, while the lamp of God shines not in the holy place? They avail just nothing nor will they last long, such as they are, but will soon give place to the more decided actings of an Ahaz who would not occupy an anomalous position.

From the above reflections we may draw the following profitable moral, namely, that communion City God must ever hold a higher place than service for God — *secret* fellowship with God must never be put out of its place by *public* engagement even in godly things. There are many who are ready enough to perform showy acts of service apparently *for* God, who doubtless would find little craving after private communion *with* Him. Let us, then, remember that if God does not receive the full homage of the heart, it matters not what we may achieve with our *hands* in the way of outward service, or with our *intellects* in the way of learning doctrine, our foundation is undoubtedly unsound, and the whole fabric will speedily tumble upon us, and bury us in its ruins; and, moreover, the greater the height, or the more showy the architecture of the superstructure, the greater will be the crash — the more melancholy will be the desolation. I feel that these things are worthy of the serious attention of professing Christians in an age like this of so much outward show, but so very little inward vital power of divine life in the soul — so much preaching and writing — so very little *living* — so much of the *head* and *hands*, but so little of the heart and affections — so much for the eye of man, but so little for the eye of God. Our unceasing cry to God should be for power, power, power, spiritual power — without this all is thorough vanity.

We now turn to Hezekiah, whose history will yield us somewhat more comfort than that of his two predecessors on the throne of Judah. Of him it is written, that "he, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them." This was a happy opening, of his way — an encouraging pledge of what his whole after course was about to be. A course *begun with* God is sure, in the long run, to prove a triumphant one. There may be failure — difficulty — temptation — sorrow — clouds and darkness; yet, in the end, it will be made manifest that he who begins his course in the sanctuary will end in the glory. "They that be planted in *the house* of the Lord shall flourish in *the courts* of our God. (Psalm 92: 12.) Hezekiah, through mercy, seems to have felt this; we find him, at once, beginning at the right point. He did not go out into the mountains to build, but proceeded directly to the work of a thorough reformation. He sent the Levites into the very innermost. part of the house of the Lord, to

cleanse it, and thus set God in his due and proper place, feeling persuaded that, once that grand point was secured, all the rest would follow in course.

In all this Hezekiah teaches us a most salutary lesson. In the experience and actings of Christians, everything depends upon the place which God occupies in the heart; in other words, there is a strong moral link between our estimate of God, and our conduct; if our thoughts of God are low, low will be our standard of Christian walk; if high, on the contrary, the result will be accordingly. 'Thus when Israel, at the foot of Mount Horeb, "changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass," the Lord's words were, "Thy people have *corrupted themselves*". Mark these words: "corrupted themselves." They could not do otherwise than corrupt themselves when they let down their thoughts of the dignity and majesty of God so low as to imagine, for a moment, that He was like "an ox that eateth grass." Similar is the teaching of Romans 1. There the Apostle, by the Spirit, shows us that the reason of all the abominations of the Gentile nations must be sought for in the fact that, "when they knew God, they glorified Him not *as* God." Thus they too "corrupted themselves."

This is a principle possessing vast practical influence. If we lower God we must necessarily lower ourselves. In this, I conceive, we are carried far above all merely systematic views of truth — it is not at all a question of mere doctrine. No, it leads us into the deep recesses of the soul, there to ponder, as beneath the piercing jealous eye of God, the estimate which we as individuals are daily and hourly forming of Him. We cannot refuse to apply our minds seriously to this important point of truth; our neglect of it will be found to contain much of the secret of our own low walk and lamentable deadness. God is not sufficiently exalted in our thoughts — He has not the supreme place in our affections — we do not sufficiently live in the atmosphere of His divine benevolence and faithfulness — our own state of mind — our experience — our services — our conflicts — our sorrows — our infirmities have, in a great measure, got in between our souls and God, and obscured the soul-stirring light of His countenance. Now, whenever *our own things so* act upon us as to hinder that calm, fixed, and certain rest of

the heart and conscience in redeeming love, and the eternal efficacy of the work of atonement, we are sure to lapse into the mere religiousness and legalism of nature, or into thorough worldliness and moral evil.

The above train of thought is, I conceive, suggested by the first act of king Hezekiah. He laid a good foundation — he acted upon the precept afterwards delivered by the Lord Jesus to his disciples, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." He felt that his fortifications and buildings should all give place to the house of God — he could not think of dwelling in a ceiled house while the temple of the Lord lay neglected; and he, — therefore, as it were, went right in to the inner part of the sanctuary and worked out from that as a grand starting point. And here we are invited to pause for a moment in order to contrast the divine and human order of service. Man says you must begin *without* and work in; Scripture says you must begin *within* and work *out*. *Man* says you must go out into the mountains and build castles and towers, and then come into the sanctuary, in virtue of what you have done, and set matters right there; Scripture says you must *first* enter into the inner part of the house of the Lord, and work out from that, stage by stage, until you find yourself in a fit condition to build fortifications if required. In a word, man says you must work *for* life; Scripture says you must work *from* it man says *do* and *live*; God says *live* and *do*. This is a happy contrast for the helpless sinner who feels that God's way alone is it that can meet his case.

But to return. I think we shall find a truly divine order in all the actings of Hezekiah, at least as regards the reformation. He did not merely begin right, but he continued right. It may be said of him, save "in the matter of the ambassadors," that all his works were "begun, continued, and ended in God." He determined to keep the Passover unto the Lord; and, in doing so, to act upon the largeness of God's own principle with reference *to all* Israel. He would not selfishly confine the aspect of this great foundation feast, or the cleansing efficacy of the blood, to the narrow limits of Judah or Jerusalem, but rightly commanded "that the burnt offering and the sin-offering should be made for ALL, ISRAEL." (2 Chr. 29: 24.)

True; Israel had grievously apostatised, and become sunk in gross idolatry, but what of that? The blood that could cleanse Judah could cleanse Israel, and both stood equally in need of it. And, may we not say, whenever a soul is taught of God, it will always entertain those large thoughts about *the whole family of God*. There is no such thing as a section of the body of Christ; you must either think of the whole body or nothing. Every truth to be seen in its fullness, must be seen as bearing upon the whole body; whether it be the redemption in which we stand, the ministry by which we are sustained, or the hope by which we are animated, all must be believed in connection with the whole body. "In thy book were *all my members* written" — "He keepeth *all his bones*, not one of them is broken."

Now, it was this largeness of heart, and comprehensiveness of view, with regard to all Israel, that enabled king Hezekiah to send the following touching message throughout all the land of Israel, "Ye children of Israel, turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the king of Assyria." (2 Chr. 30: 6.) There is much moral power and spiritual intelligence exhibited in this message. It is plainly a message issuing from the sanctuary — a message from one who had entered in some measure into the largeness of the Divine mind. It is the purpose of God that Israel and Judah shall yet, in company, tread the earthly courts, and stand in the efficacy of the same sacrifice.. Jehoshaphat had entered into a union with Ahab, king of Israel, for military purposes. (2 Chr. 18.) This union was, as we know, quite wrong. True, it was for a good cause namely, to recover Ramoth Gilead out of the hand of the king of Syria. Now this Ramoth was one of the cities of refuge; and to recover it out of the hands of the enemy must have appeared a very desirable object to the mind of Jehoshaphat; an object, moreover, which might be regarded as a good reason for entering into a league with Ahab. Yet, was it all wrong! The basis of their union was wrong it was not a union based upon "the blood of the lamb;" hence, notwithstanding it was for a religious, and, in itself a right object, God could not approve of it; it proved a source of much sorrow of heart to Jehoshaphat.

Not so, however, in the case of the good king Hezekiah. He sought to bring Israel and Judah together, not even to recover a city of refuge — not even for a religious object. No; he sought to gather their scattered tribes around the one altar at Jerusalem “whither the tribes go up.” He had set up a centre of unity round which every Israelite could rally because he was an Israelite, but which had no attraction for those whose hearts were uncircumcised.

[It is of importance to see that Christian union requires, as strictly, the *exclusion* of those whose profession and life prove them to be of the world, as it does the admission of those who, however feeble and faltering, are of God. The recognition of this principle would preserve us from the two extremes of latitudinarianism on the one hand, and sectarianism on the other. We are not to receive or acknowledge those whose whole bearing is marked by carnality and worldliness, and woe is unto us if we exclude the very feeblest of the lambs of Jesus. It is not charity to admit to the Lord's table a promiscuous mass of worldliness, profanity, and moral evil; nor is it purity to shut out therefrom one of the least of those little ones who believe in Jesus, and desire to follow Him, even though such an one may not be able to come up to our standard or point at view. The grand motto for us is, "Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." (Rom. 15: 7.)]

But it is most important that we should see what it was that enabled him to send out the invitation. If Hezekiah had been walking in the cold and withering exclusiveness of the flesh, he would have left the children of Israel to their idols and thought only of his own enjoyment, and that of those in immediate connection with him. But no; his heart had been softened and his affections expanded in the presence of God — he had felt the sweetness and atoning efficacy of the blood — he saw its power to meet the need of idolatrous Israel — he knew that the lamb slain on the altar was the divine basis for the union of all, and he would therefore seek, in the attractive power of grace, to draw together — the children of God that were scattered abroad." And is there not deep instruction for us in all this May we not ask why it is that we have so little of this holy attractive power about us? why are we not drawing the children of God together? I believe it is because we are not walking

in the practical exhibition of the Lord Jesus, who said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men unto me*." (John 12: 32.) We are not acting out the great principle set forth by Hezekiah, namely "The burnt-offering and the sin-offering must be made for *all Israel*." The table of the Lord is for all who belong to Him, and not for such as hold certain opinions merely. How different would be the state of things were all those who really love the name of Jesus to do as Hezekiah did. Instead of setting up such bonds of union as would admit the uncircumcised while they exclude the Israel of God, we should then have but the one bond — The blood of the Lamb" — one centre — one table — one object. There would be decided testimony, both by word and deed, against everything, in the least degree, calculated to hinder the unity of the body.

And, if it be asked, What are we to set up? the answer is, Set up nothing as a bond of union but the name of Jesus — separate from everything that would exclude those who bear the name of Jesus or admit those who bear it not, or love it. This is the way to carry out, as far as you are concerned, the unity of the body of Christ. The question is not whether Ye are to expect a union of all Christians before the Lord comes. Were we to act upon this and similar questions we should do nothing at all. If we may go and form sects, or if we may give our countenance and support to the formation and continuance thereof, because we need not expect all to be united till the Lord comes, we may as well say that, because we shall not be free from indwelling corruption while in the body, it is useless to try to subdue it. No; our place, as individuals, is to do all in our power towards the unity of the body by discountenancing everything tending to divide it. Hezekiah never thought of inquiring whether the time were come for uniting the two houses; he knew that it was the divine purpose that they should be united, and knowing this, he endeavoured, as far as in him lay, to secure the object. The Spirit will ever lead us to aim at the divine purpose, and to act upon divine principle in carrying it out. If it be the purpose of God that His children should be "gathered together in one," it must ever be opposed to His purpose to have them "scattered abroad." Hence we may feel assured that, when we are endeavouring to secure the unity of the body, we are working for a divine object, our only care should be to act upon a divine principle.

[I believe, as old principles continue to work, and new ones begin to show themselves, Christians will more fully feel the importance of being well instructor in the simple principles of truth respecting the divine basis of Christian union and fellowship. I would refer the Christian reader to the following Scripture, viz. John 11: 52, and John 12: 32, as affording clear and simple guidance on the subject of Christian union. "*He* should gather together *in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad;" and again, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* unto me." Here Christ is presented as the great centre round which all His members should revolve as planets round their central sun. If, then Christ be the centre, is it not as great a sin to set up any other; centre, even though it should be a point of truth, as it was for Jeroboam to break in upon the unity of God's earthly people by setting up calves at Bethel and Dan, when Jerusalem was their grand centre of unity? I believe it will, at least, be found to be productive of consequences as disastrous as regards testimony in the world. For mark the consequence of Jeroboam's act instead of *one* centre there were *three*, viz., Jerusalem, Bethel, and Dan; and, as a consequence, while the people were moving towards their various centres they were moving away from each other; whereas, had they maintained the one divinely appointed centre, it would have effectually secured the gathering together of the children of Israel, for all should come to Jerusalem from north, east, south, and west, but all should not go to Dan nor to Bethel, seeing they were not of divine but human appointment. Now, Hezekiah felt so assured that Jerusalem was the centre round which all Israel should gather that in inviting them to come thither he could say, "Turn again to *the Lord God of your fathers*." Such language would have been quite unwarrantable if Jerusalem were not the divinely appointed centre.

To us, however, it is not Jerusalem but the name of Jesus which constitutes the centre and bond of unity; and, when anything is added to the name of Jesus as necessary to our union, unity is interfered with and a sect formed. And is not that name sufficient? If believers are introduced by the blood of Jesus into the holiest of all — if they, through grace, are *together* there — if their names are enrolled *together* in the Lamb's book of life — if they are raised up *together* and made to *sit together* in heavenly places now in Spirit

and by faith, and by and by to be, in actual fact, caught up *together* into the air, why should they not be *together* here below? We are together in God's view, and moreover, we are going on to that place where we shall be one in the view of all created intelligence, and must we by the way, shut ourselves up in our little enclosures, and frown on each other from thence? Ah! no; let all who see This blessed principle of Christian union *act upon it*, and God will surely be glorified thereby.

I would further add that as the name of Jesus is the only bond of union for Christians, so the Holy Ghost is the only Power of ministry for Christians. Let these two principles be received in the power of them, and we shall see what they lead to.

I would observe here that we must take care that, while seeking to lead the Lord's people into the liberty and unity of the Spirit, we do not lose sight of the hopeless and irrecoverable ruin of the professing church as a *corporate witness* in the earth. The observation of a valued servant of God is seasonable on this head: "If we are seeking a testimony we will go to ruin; but if we seek to walk with God, we shall stand." It has occurred to me that any effort after the gathering of the Lord's people just now partakes of the Character of the midnight cry" of Matt. 25. It has been well observed that when the time of coming of the bridegroom arrives :All the wise virgins shall be found *together*, The parable quite teaches this. Those who had the oil were altogether and ready; but those who had none — the foolish — the mere professors, were scattered about looking for oil *This should excite in the minds of all true believers a desire to be found together.*]

But observe the two-fold effect of this message of Hezekiah: They laughed them to scorn and mocked them; nevertheless, divers humbled themselves." (2 Chr. 30: 10, 11.) This is very instructive. The invitation was received very differently by different parties; but the reception, though so different in each case, proved the message to have been divine — to have been from the sanctuary. Grace must either humble the heart or call forth reproach and scorn; in either case its genuineness is proved. "To the one we are a savour of death unto death; and to the other of life unto life." Hezekiah, however, could bear the reproach and mockery while he had intelligence about

the value of the blood that had been shed; and while he beheld "divers humbling themselves" he would deem himself amply repaid for his trouble in sending out the message.

Now, if we were walking in the energy of divine grace, we should witness the same results; some, no doubt, would mock, but "divers would humble themselves;" as it is, we see neither the one nor the other, at least, in the measure in which they might be seen: on the contrary, *in status quo* seems to be too much the order on all sides; thus proving that all is not right. The saints are not drawn together: nor are the people of the world "cut to the heart" by the sharp edge of holy testimony; a painful lukewarmness — a miserable neutrality is maintained as regards divine things; while the things of this world are grasped at with an eagerness and a penetration that fully demonstrate where our affections lie. Should this lamentable condition of things not be counteracted, everything will go to ruin amongst us. We cannot remain neuter. We must either be gathering with Christ or scattering abroad. If we are not engaged for Christ we are engaged against Him — to do nothing for Christ is to do *something* for Satan.

But, it has been observed, that there was divine order in the actings of Hezekiah. This I think will be seen at every step of his course. He would not allow the fact of Israel's idolatry to hinder the outflow of his love to them, nor his efforts to lead them into the only true place of blessedness. He would seek to lead them around the one common centre — the altar at Jerusalem — he would assemble Israel's tribes around the paschal lamb, quite regardless of bygone failures — he would act upon the word of the Lord, by the prophet Isaiah, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people." In all this he was acting in harmony with some of the very finest principles of truth. It is ever God's way to lead the soul away from evil by presenting something good. It would not have been the divine mode of acting for Hezekiah to wait until he, in company with the house of Judah, had kept the feast, and then go out into the cities of Israel and preach against idolatry. He would have had no power whatever in so doing. One of the evils of idolatry was the interfering with the unity of the people of God, and splitting them into sects and parties; how, then, could Hezekiah bear testimony against schism in Israel if he himself

had not begun on the only principle of unity. It would have been just as sectarian to confine the aspect of the feast within the limits of Judah as to set up another altar, or centre of unity. The true method of delivering Christians from sectarianism is to let them taste the sweetness of unity. So thought Hezekiah, and so he acted "And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably (to the heart) unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering Peace-offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness." (2 Chr. 30: 21-23.)

Here was the true way to teach Israel the evils of idolatry. They had never spent such happy days around the Calf at Dan. They had never tasted of such joys while under the influence of Jeroboam's system of political religion. No; nothing could touch the heart of a true Israelite like the notes of a divinely appointed priest or Levite — nothing could feast and gladden his soul like the divinely appointed sacrifices And oh! is it not a happy thing that we may judge as to the rightness of any system or institution by its effect on the soul? Whatever is really of God will make the soul really happy; on the contrary, whatever is not of God will have opposite effect. Thus, in the above interesting scene, when we observe the "gladness" of the "very great congregation" we are sure that God was there, and moreover, that a most powerful influence would be likely to proceed from such an assembly. The spirit that prevailed was such as could not fail to act in decided hostility to the whole system of idolatry and sectarianism which had spread its withering influence over the cities of Israel A mighty moral influence was about to go forth from Jerusalem like a flood to bear down the altars and idols of the land of Israel, and which, had it proceeded onwards, would have for ever upset the great seat of idolatry and sectarianism.

The moral lesson taught us in all this is very plain, anal very important. The true principle upon which to proceed in any

reformation is not so much to pull down what *is false* as to build up what is *true*. Hezekiah felt that could he only assemble Israel around the true altar, and lead them into the sweetness of the true worship of the God of their fathers, the false altars would soon come to the ground; nor was he at all disappointed, for "*when all this was finished*, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places, and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their cities." (2 Chr. 26: 1.)

Here is service happily flowing out of worship, the only true source from which it can flow to the glory of God. One would naturally think that those altars would have attracted the attention, and drawn forth the indignation of the children of Israel as they journeyed up to Jerusalem; but such was not the case. No; they needed *first* to experience the power and blessedness of the truth in their souls — they needed first to drink, as it were, at the fountain head — they had to come up to the sanctuary at Jerusalem, where stood the true priest offering the true sacrifice, and having received strength and gladness in the Divine presence, and in the midst of His worshipping people, they were able to go forth and act in testimony outside. In fact, we may observe the same line of conduct pursued both by Israel and Hezekiah. The latter began with God in the sanctuary, so did the former. Hezekiah opened the doors of the house of the Lord ere he laid his hand upon an idolatrous altar. The children of Israel found strength at the altar of God to pull down the altars of Satan. But, as in Hezekiah's case, so surely as he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord would he level to the ground the idolatrous altars; so, in Israel's case, it was not more certain that God had strengthened them than that they would use that strength for the putting down of evil. It was not possible that they could destroy idolatry in passing from Dan to Jerusalem. No; they went from Dan to Jerusalem for the purpose of gathering strength, so that in passing back from Jerusalem they might act in testimony for God against evil. In all cases of departure from the place in which God has put us, the true way is not to allow ourselves to become entangled with the failure, but to get back at *once*, by humiliation and confession,

into our proper position. By this means we obtain a correct view of the failure and real power over it. The children of Israel, during their fourteen days of "gladness," obtained a view of the deformity of idolatry and sectarianism, together with power to execute judgement upon it. This they never could have obtained at Dan. It is only when we have made our escape from a tottering edifice that we can really perceive how near it is to its final overthrow.

Thus we see that it was just as much in accordance with divine principle that the children of Israel should, ere laying their hands on a single idolatrous altar, repair to Jerusalem, "the city of their solemnities," as it was for Hezekiah to repair to the house of the Lord ere he took a single step in the service of God outside. Both were acting upon a principle truly divine. When Israel had once felt the power of their ancient worship they could form some idea of how far they had departed therefrom, and also of the way in which to retrace their steps; and when Hezekiah had learnt something of the blessedness of having the true God set up in His proper place, between the Cherubim, he was prepared to see the evils — the abominable evils — of setting up idolatrous altars in the streets of Jerusalem.

Before I turn from this branch of our subject, I would say a word for the consolation of any reader who may feel that he has declined, in any measure, from God. To such an one, then, I would say, if you are really conscious of failure and spiritual decline — if you have sinned in any way and grieved the Spirit — if you have failed in the due regulation of your thoughts and ways so that Satan has gotten an advantage over you to weaken and trouble you — if you are troubled about any failure in service or worship — if, in a word, there be any thing whatsoever acting as a weight upon your heart or a cloud upon your spirit; your path is not to sit brooding over the evil, but, like the children of Israel, *at once*, get up to God's altar — fix your eyes upon the blood — look straight to Jesus, and see in Him the measure of your acceptance "before the throne of God," and be assured of it you will find your spirit restored and strengthened to conflict with the very evil that sinks you into the dust, and sends you mourning all the day. True restoration is not a struggle to get up out of the mazes of evil and corruption in which

we may be entangled, but rather entering, in the unquestioning confidence of faith, into the divine testimony as to our perfect acceptance in the Beloved. Thus we at once find ourselves beneath the full blaze of God's redeeming love, and trample the mazes of evil beneath our feet in the holy triumph of faith. "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory."

But to return. It could not be expected that the enemy would long look on quietly at such a happy scene. There was too much glory to God, and too much enjoyment to the people of God, to admit of his being an unmoved spectator in the matter. Wherefore, "After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself:" (2 Chr. 32: 1.) We cannot expect to pass onward without encountering storms. We have a malignant and powerful foe to cope with; and we shall seldom find on earth a happy scene of sunshine without some cloud to overshadow it. Thus Hezekiah and his happy train of worshippers are broken in upon by Sennacherib and his rude warriors. But, blessed be God, the sanctuary and its holy occupations will never unfit us for active service. On the contrary, we can only serve with effect when we have been in the sanctuary. It is when we have been acting as *priests Within*, that we are prepared to act as Levites or men of war *without*; but we must not reverse this divinely appointed order. Hezekiah was ready for action when the time for action came. True; he vastly preferred the sanctuary with its solemn silence to the din of the battlefield, and the loveable altars of God to the castles and towers of military genius; nevertheless, when there was need, Hezekiah could bring the wisdom acquired in secret to bear upon the overthrow of his enemies in public.

There is, however, a marked difference in the way in which Hezekiah's actions are presented in 2 Chr 32 and in Isaiah 37. In the former, it strikes me, we have the matter presented more as a narrative of facts, while in the latter it is looked at in a moral point of view as bearing upon the future destinies of Israel. In 2 Chr. we are informed about Hezekiah's military operations; in Isaiah these are altogether overlooked. We shall therefore look a little at the

closing scenes of Hezekiah's interesting life as put before us by the Spirit in Isaiah.

I have already observed that Hezekiah vastly preferred the silence of the sanctuary to the din of the battlefield. This is very apparent throughout his entire course; but specially so in Isaiah; he spent the most, if not all, of his time in services connected with the sanctuary. God's place "between the Cherubim" gave him far more concern than his own place on the throne of David; and so far does he carry his attachment to the house of the Lord that when the time comes at which we might expect him to issue forth therefrom into the field of battle, we actually find him making the very sanctuary itself his field of battle. This is particularly instructive. The proud king of Assyria was at the gates of Jerusalem, with a mighty conquering host, and one would naturally expect to find Hezekiah in the midst of his men of war — buckling on his armour — girding on his sword — mounting his chariot; but no; Hezekiah was different from most kings and captains — he had found out a place of strength which was quite unknown to Sennacherib — he had discovered a field of battle in which he could conquer without striking *a* blow. And mark the armour with which he girds himself: "And it came to pass, when Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and *covered himself with sackcloth*, and went into the house of the Lord." (Isa. 37: 1)

Here was the armour in which the king of Judah was about to cope with the king of Assyria. Strange armour! The armour of the sanctuary. What would Sennacherib have said had he seen this! He had never met such an antagonist before — he had never come in contact with a man who, instead of covering himself with a coat of mail, would cover himself with sackcloth, and instead of rushing forth into the field of battle in his chariot, would fall upon his knees in the temple. This would have appeared a novel mode of warfare in the eyes of the king of Assyria. He had met the kings of Hamath and Arphad, etc.; but if he had, it was upon his own principle, and in his own way; but he had never encountered such an antagonist as Hezekiah. In fact, what gave the latter such uncommon power in this contest was the feeling that *he* was nothing — that "an arm of flesh" was of no avail; in a word, that it was just Jehovah or nothing. This

is specially seen in the act of spreading the letter before the Lord. Hezekiah was enabled by faith to retire out of the scene and make it altogether a question between Jehovah and the king of Assyria. It was not Sennacherib and Hezekiah, but Sennacherib and Jehovah. This tells us the meaning of the sackcloth. Hezekiah felt himself to be utterly helpless, and he took the place of helplessness — he tells the Lord that the king of Assyria had reproached *Him* — he calls upon Him to vindicate His own glorious name, feeling assured that in so doing He would deliver His people.

Mark, then, this wondrous scene. Repair to the sanctuary, and there behold one poor weak solitary man, on his knees — pouring out his soul to Him who dwelt between the Cherubim — no military preparations — no reviewing of troops — "the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth pass to and fro from Hezekiah to the prophet Isaiah — all is apparent weakness. On the other hand, see a mighty conqueror leading on a numerous army flushed with victory, all eager for spoil. Surely, one might say, speaking after the manner of men, all is over with Hezekiah and Jerusalem — surely Sennacherib and his proud host will swallow up, in a moment, such a feeble band! And observe further, the ground which Sennacherib takes in all this. He says, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? I say, sayest thou (but they are but vain words), I have counsel and strength for war: now, on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt: whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it; so is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all that trust in him. But if thou say to me, we trust in the Lord our God; *is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?* (Isa. 36: 4-7.)

Here we observe that Sennacherib makes the very reformation which Hezekiah had effected a ground of reproach; thus leaving him, as he vainly thought, no resting place or foundation for his confidence. Again he says, "Am I come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? *The Lord said unto me Go up against this land and destroy it.* (Verse 10.) This was indeed putting Hezekiah's faith to the test — faith must pass through the furnace — it will not do to *say* that we trust in the Lord, we must *prove* that we do, and

that too when everything apparently is against us. How, then, does Hezekiah meet all these lofty words? In the silent dignity of faith. "The king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not." (Verse 21.) Such was the king's bearing in the eyes of the people; yea, rather, such is ever the bearing of faith — calm — self-possessed dignified in the presence of man; while, at the same time, ready to sink into the very dust of self-abasement in the presence of God. The man of faith can say to his fellow, "Stand still and see the salvation of God;" and, at the same moment, send up to God the cry of conscious weakness (See Ex. 14: 13-15.)

So it was with the king of Judah at this solemn and trying crisis. Harken to him while., in the retirement of the sanctuary, shut in with God, he pours out the anxieties of his soul in the ear of One who was willing to hear and able to help. "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel that dwellest between the Cherubim, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to *reproach the living God*. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire: *for they were no gods*, but the works of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only." (2 Chr. 37: 15-20.) Hezekiah puts the matter entirely into Jehovah's hands, and retires out of it himself. He does not seek to make little of the difficulty — he admits that "the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries" — but why? Because their gods were not like Jehovah — they did not know what it was to put their case into the hands of the living God that made heaven and earth. This was the secret of their overthrow. What triumphant faith! What bold confident pleading! Where, we may ask, while we hearken to it, was the difficulty which such faith would not surmount? The faith that has to do with the One who made heaven and earth will make but little account of an army be it ever so numerous. Faith can behold myriads of angels and mountains covered with chariots of fire for the defence of the ones who can trust Jehovah.

But let us see how Hezekiah's prayer was received and answered from between the Cherubim. The Lord will never refuse to be brought into a difficulty, if only He be allowed to act, and not robbed of His peculiar glory. Hear his answer on this occasion. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria: this is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him, *The Virgin, the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.* Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? And against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even against the Holy One of Israel (Verse 21-23.) It has been observed that Hezekiah was enabled, by grace, to retire out of the difficulty altogether. He declared *his inability* to cope with the king of Assyria by the very act of covering himself with sackcloth instead of putting on his armour. His attitude in the house of the Lord, had this utterance — *God or nothing.* Seeing, therefore that the faith of this humble self-abased man had brought the Lord God of Israel and the king of Assyria into direct contact, the same Lord God of Israel most graciously led the man covered with sackcloth into the rich spoils of victory over the foe. Hezekiah had said "He hath sent to reproach the living God; "the Lord replies, "Whom hast thou reproached — the Holy One of Israel." Now, Sennacherib had never calculated upon meeting such an antagonist — he had never thought that his letter would be scanned by the eye of the living God. He expected to meet flesh and blood, sword and spear, as he had ever been accustomed to meet; but lo! a man of faith prays — God hears; and forth goes the angel of the Lord, and, in a moment, mows to the ground "a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses." (Verse 36.)

Thus we see somewhat of Hezekiah's vast resources. He knew the value of being *alone with God* — he felt more comfort and real power in the secret of God's presence than surrounded by troops of armed warriors — he experienced something of the reality of the words afterwards uttered by the Apostle, "When I am *weak* then *am I strong.*" And, we may say, had Sennacherib's army consisted of millions instead of thousands, the angel of the Lord would have thought just as little of sweeping them all off the face of the earth in

a moment, for when Jehovah determines to act in behalf of His people, and in answer to their prayers, He makes no account of anything or any one. "He overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea: *for His mercy endureth for ever.*" (Ps. 136: 15.)

Nor is it otherwise now. Let but faith address the mercy seat, and the most astounding results will follow. "If ye shall ask *anything* in my name I will do it." Again, "I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching *anything that* they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven." (Matt. 18: 19.) Oh! we have but little idea of what our God would do for us did we only honour Him. We are too cramped in our thoughts and formal in our prayers. We are too frequently like the king of Israel who "smote the ground thrice and stayed" when he "should have smote it six times." He does not seem to have known the meaning or value of smiting, and the same may be said of us in reference to prayer. Let us, then, in all our difficulties, honour the Lord by bringing Him into them, and we may be confident He will bring us into the enjoyment of full victory over them, be they great or small; His power can reach the greatest — His love will stoop to the smallest. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall Sweep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4: 6, 7.) How beautifully was this exemplified in Hezekiah! His commandment to the people was, "*Answer him not.*" But why? "Because he knew that *Jehovah would answer him.* And so He did, blessed for ever be His most excellent name, and that too in such a way as to prove to Hezekiah that he would be no loser by having devoted himself to the interests of the house of the Lord — He would never allow it to be said that the king of Judah had been working or worshipping in the temple when he ought to have been fortifying his kingdom against the invasion of an enemy. If Hezekiah had concerned himself about retaining Jehovah in His place between the Cherubim, Jehovah would graciously show him that, even in a political point of view, he had made no mistake, for He in one night accomplished what the military preparations of an age might have failed to do: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." God will never be a debtor to any one;

only let us throw our whole souls onto His work, and the end will declare how far we have acted upon sound principles. "Prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the window of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal. 3: 10.)

I doubt not there are many amongst us who feel ashamed, and most justly so, at the undue importance attached by us to *our own things*, while the interests of the house of God — the church of the living God — engage so little of our attention. The Lord often teaches us our shortcoming in this particular by letting us see that even with all our engagement about self we fail of our object. "Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, *and ye run every man to his own house. Therefore* the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit." (Hag. 1: 9, 10) The Lord deals with his people upon a principle of retributive justice as conveyed in these words, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. (Gal. 6: 7.) This method of dealing does not interfere in the least with the perfect acceptance of the believers person, through grace, nor yet with his standing in grace. *No*; these, blessed be God, are settled points, nor can anything unsettle them; yet does the Apostle, by the Spirit, teach us that "he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly."

Now, this is a principle of very wide application. It does not matter whether we apply it to one character of sowing or another; if we cannot afford to sow liberally for the Lord, He will not let us have an abundant harvest. If we allow not our hearts and minds to go out after the church — after the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ, need we wonder if our own souls are left in a barren and unprofitable state? If we occupy our minds — solely about our own things — our circumstances — our difficulties — our sorrows — our conflicts — need we wonder if such things do eventually prove quite sufficient to engross our every thought? If Hezekiah had merely thought of building "castles and towers" — if he had merely applied himself to the fortification of his kingdom and the establishment and preservation of his throne, how could he presume to go into the house of the Lord to look for aid in the time of need?

Might he not, under such circumstances, have expected to hear instead of the glorious answer above quoted, such words as these, "Get thee to thy castles and towers, let then deliver thee in the time of thy tribulation." But such was not the case. Hezekiah had taken care of Jehovah's house, and Jehovah would take care of Hezekiah's kingdom, for God is not unrighteous to forget the work anal labour of love. And so will it be in every case. Let no one imagine that his soul will prosper if he be not devoting himself to the interests of the house of God If we would see the proud Assyrian laid low we must be in the secret of the divine presence — we must be more before the Lord, and more for Him. Not, of course, for the purpose of gaining anything, but through pure and positive dedication to Him as the one who has given us everything, and made us through the exercise of sovereign grace all we are, or all we shall ever be.

Such, then, was the good king Hezekiah, so far. We have seen him as a *priest* in the sanctuary — as a *Levite* among his brethren, and as a man of war dealing with the enemy without; and, in everything, we observe the same loveliness and moral attraction about him. He furnishes us with a remarkable example of the blessedness of the man who begins, continues, and ends his works in God. This remarkable man seems to have specially breathed the sweet prayer of one of our own poets,

"Let me my weary mind recline

On that eternal love of thine,

And human thoughts forget:

Child-like attend what thou wilt Say:

Go forth and do it while 'tis day,

Yet never leave my sweet retreat."

He would gain a glorious victory over the foe, but he would do so without leaving his sweet retreat in the sanctuary. He would make

the temple his council-chamber and make his military arrangements on his knees. Thus he conquered — thus he gained a noiseless victory. The king of Judah was on his knees while the king of Assyria was being brought back to his own land with a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his lips, like a wild beast; a striking example of what pride ever leads to. Nor did his course end here. Shameful and humiliating as it must have been to such a proud and haughty conqueror to be obliged to return into his own land, overcome by he knew not what — a man covered with sackcloth — yet had he to meet with something far worse. He might naturally have hoped for security at least in the temple of his God. But no; he knew not what it was to cover himself with sackcloth in the presence of Him who dwelt between the Cherubim; hence the treatment he received at the shrine of the object of his adoration. "It came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword." (Isa. 37: 38.) Such will be the end of all those who exalt themselves against the Lord and His people.

I have already observed that the prophet Isaiah seems to deal with the striking history of Hezekiah more in a moral way and as connected with the future destinies of the house of Israel. Looking at it in this way, we may behold in Sennacherib a sample of "the wilful king " who shall exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, and "shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every God, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished." (Compare 2 Thess. 2. Dan. 11: 16-45.) Hezekiah, too, covered with sackcloth, may be viewed as a sample of the righteous remnant in the latter day, crying for deliverance from the hand of the mighty oppressor; when the Lord shall "bring them into the wilderness and speak comfortably unto them," and when "the virgin, the daughter of Zion, shall shake her head at Him who made the earth to tremble, and shook the kingdoms." Then indeed "the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall take root downward and bear fruit upward: for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of Mount Zion; the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this." (Isa. 37: 31, 32.)

If it be allowable to look at the latter times of Hezekiah in this point of view it enhances the value of his history to us exceedingly: for it not only yields us deep moral principles for every-day conduct, but also an important prophetic sketch of Israel's history in the latter days. May we have grace to love and value the testimonies of our heavenly Father more and more, and the rather as we perceive the miserable uncertainty of all human events and human opinions. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: *but the Word of Our God shall stand for ever.*" (Isa. 40: 6-8.)

In Isaiah 38 we find King Hezekiah brought down very low — even "to the gates of the grave;" and that, too, not in the circumstances or condition of his kingdom, as before, but in his own person. He is allowed, as it were to feel the withering breath of the king of terrors, as before he had felt the haughty threats of the king of Assyria. He is made to feel that he must seek a refuge in God, not only as regards *his kingdom* but as regards *himself*. This was a trying time for him; but it was a salutary time. We can easily perceive the hand of a *faithful* friend in this solemn scene. Hezekiah had been passing through much that might be easily used by the enemy to puff him up. A long course of devotedness to the service of God — the glorious reformation effected by his instrumentality — the influence exercised upon the priests and Levites, the men of Judah and Israel — and, lastly, the splendid deliverance vouchsafed him by the Lord of hosts over a most formidable foe — all these things were calculated, in an eminent degree, to act upon the pride of his heart; and, as we shall see in the sequels Hezekiah was not without knowing what pride meant. :But oh! how we must admire the faithfulness of our God, when, after having glanced at the brilliant scenes of the life of this good man, we hearken to the solemn words; with which this chapter opens. "Thus saith the Lord, Set *thine house* in order: for thou shalt die and not live." It was now to be a *personal question*. "Thine house." He had been much engaged about the Lord's house, and most happily so — he had been deeply exercised about this condition of the kingdom; and rightly so. He would have been unworthy of a seat on the throne of David had it been

otherwise. But there was a far deeper matter than all this. The Lord would come more closely to his servant. He would deal with him about his *house* "*Set thine house in order.*" This was indeed a searching word. Many a secret spring in the heart, unheeded amid the bustle of active service, would vibrate when thus touched — many a hidden chamber of the soul would be unlocked which, it may be, much intercourse with men would have kept more firmly closed. There is an air of deep solemnity about the sick bed of Hezekiah which is particularly striking; and the rather, as the transition is so sudden. At one moment we view him in the arms of victory and triumph, in the next we behold him at "the gates of the grave" — now we see him in the sanctuary with his head "lifted up above his enemies round about;" in a moment after we behold him laid prostrate, and the angel of death on his way to strike the blow; yet in both we can trace the same God. True, in the former case it is God in grace and mercy, in the latter, God in wisdom and faithfulness; but still God; and one hardly knows whether to admire most the grace of these words to Sennacherib, "The daughter of Zion hath despised thee," or the faithfulness of the words to Hezekiah, "Set thine house in order." In the one we see God delivering his servant from an *enemy*; in the other we see him delivering him from *himself*.

Well, what will Hezekiah do in this hour of his need? He cannot go up to the house of the Lord; but he can go up to the Lord himself, and so he does. "Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord." [It may be a matter of enquiry with some, why Hezekiah should have been so anxious to live? The answer to such an enquiry is, that as a *Jew* he was taught to regard long life as a special blessing from the hand of the God of Israel; but it would be rather inconsistent for a believer under the gospel dispensation to seek for long life. It was an object of desire with a Jew to be allowed to live long in the land; but the Christian's citizenship is, even now, in heaven, and his desire should be that what is now true in spirit and principle, might be so in reality, *i.e.* that he might be really in heaven.] This was his remedy now as at all times. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." The Lord merely intended to produce in the soul of his dear servant a proper sense of his real condition of dependence —

He would show him that the very same hand that had so recently rescued his kingdom from the jaws of the enemy must rescue himself from the jaws of death. In other words, that until both he and his kingdom could stand in the power of resurrection, there could be no permanency for either. What divine harmony exists between the words, "Set thine house in order" and "Hezekiah turned his face to the wall!" Such was his answer. "Though my house be not so with God: yet He *hath made* with me an everlasting covenant, *ordered in all things and sure*: for this is all *my salvation* and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." (2 Sam 23: 5.) Hezekiah puts himself now, as he had put his kingdom before, into the hands of Jehovah — the only place of true security.

And mark how the Lord links the deliverance of the kingdom with the raising up of the king. "Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver *thee and this city* out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city." Here we learn in the clearest manner that both Judah and Judah's king must pass through *death and resurrection*. It is something quite out of the way of nature; and, because it is so, the very course of nature is reversed; "*the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.*" What a magnificent display of the power of God in grace moving right athwart the path of nature; There is something remarkable in every scene of Hezekiah's life. His deliverance from the Assyrian was remarkable — his deliverance from death is still more so. He was enabled so to bring God into all his difficulties that his deliverance could not but exhibit much of God's remarkable actings; and, as we know, God will make no account of any thing when it stands in the way of His acting in behalf of His people; He will not only make the SUN stand still, as in Joshua's case, but He will make it go back while He puts forth the divine energies of His grace and power for the deliverance of those who lean upon Him for help. Indeed, we may say, when faith appeals to Omnipotence there is nothing too great.

However, the Lord did not deliver his servant in such a way as to interfere, in the least, with the divine lesson which He desired to teach him. This may be seen by reading carefully "the writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered

of his sickness." The experience breathed in this writing could never have been attained in the midst of the congregation — nor in the field of battle — nor any where but just where God put him even on the sick bed. None can teach like God.

Now if it be asked, What special lessons did Hezekiah learn in the time of his sickness? the fifteenth verse tells us. "What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me and himself hath done it: *I shall go softly all the years* in the bitterness of my soul." In a word. then, he learnt the need of walking softly. And surely the visitation was calculated to teach that blessed lesson, however speedily he might forget it. But there was more than this. Hezekiah learnt something about *God* as well as about *himself*. This is valuable for us. It would never do to be merely unlocking secret springs in our *hearts* if we did not, at the same time, unlock secret springs in *God's heart*. If a man only learns that there are hidden sins in his heart, and principles of evil of which he knew nothing before, he is merely plunging his spirit into miserable despondency. This is not learning anything through divine teaching. But if, while he discovers *his sin* he discovers also *God's grace* in putting away his sin, this is divine — this is learning both himself and God.

Now, it is only when a man learns himself and God in connection that he is really humbled. Grace, while it puts away our sin, leads the soul into profound humiliation because of it. Thus it was with Hezekiah; he was taught to "walk softly " by the grace that had for ever settled the question of his sins. "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou last in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: *for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back*." Here was a blessed discovery of God! It was not merely, "Thou hast delivered the kingdom out of the hand of the King of Assyria." No; but "thou hast delivered me from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all *my sins* behind thy back." Thus does Hezekiah get away from himself, away from his sins, away from the pit, to take his happy place among "*the living*" who alone can "praise and celebrate" the name of the Lord.

See then to what a happy place the soul of this good man was conducted by all the solemn dealings of God in this chapter. The chapter opened by the words, "Set shine house in order." This, as has been observed, opened up many things to his view which were calculated to humble him; but then he learns more of God's redeeming and restoring love, so that he is able to reply to the searching charge, "Set thine house in order," by the triumphant statement, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." As to his house, he knew that it was "not so with God;" yet he could cast himself upon the divine covenant which he knew was "ordered in all things and sure." "The Lord was ready to save *me*; therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."

Thus far it is most instructive to see the temple service restored Judah rescued from the hand of the oppressor, and Judah's king raised from the pit of corruption; and one is disposed to think that now the glory might show itself; but alas! alas! it cannot be so; all this is merely a shadow, blessed though it be, of what is yet to be revealed amongst us, when the true King of Judah shall take his seat on the throne of His father David, and wield the sceptre of a kingdom that shall never be moved.

We now come to consider the closing scene of Hezekiah's life, which but too plainly demonstrates the fact above stated, namely, that the glory cannot yet show itself: Upon this part of our subject, however, we need not dwell at any length; the Spirit Himself has not dwelt long upon it: for he has given us the narrative of it in two verses, and his commentary upon it in one. And, indeed, we always find the divine penman taking much greater delight in setting forth the graces than the failures of those whose history He deals with. This is specially observable in Hezekiah's history; the narrative of his good deeds occupies four long chapters in 2 Chronicles, while, with reference to his failure, we have the following few words: "Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, *God left him to try him, that he might know ALL that was in his heart.*" (2 Chr. 32: 31.) These words are but few; yet they are most comprehensive. For a man to know "*all* that was in his

heart," required no small measure of the knowledge of God's redeeming love. It would demand all that Hezekiah had learnt of God during his previous history to enable him to look into the deep recesses of his heart and behold "*all*" that was there. Oh! what was there not wrapped up in this little word "*ALL*;" who could bear it save the one who had learnt to say, "Thou hast cast *all* my sins behind thy back." Surely none else. It is only when we know that the Lord has forgiven *all* our iniquities, and healed *all* our diseases — when we are enabled, by faith, to see the divinely appointed scape-goat bearing away with him into the land of forgetfulness "*all* our iniquities, and *all* our transgressions, and *all* our sins" (Lev. 16: 21), that we can turn round and look into our hearts and see *all* the fearful evil there. To get a sight of the latter, ere we have known and proved the former, is to be overwhelmed by the terrible discovery; but when we have gotten a view of God in the cross, the more we learn of our own vileness — the nearer we approach to the end of that wonderful word "*all*," the more highly do we estimate the grace of our God, and the cleansing efficacy of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But it is very profitable to mark how that, at each successive stage of Hezekiah's truly interesting history, the Lord is dealing more and more closely with him. "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it." (John 15: 2.) The more devoted a man is to the Lord, and the more elevated his walk, the more jealously will the Lord watch over him in order that he may have still larger and more blessed proofs of his devotedness; or, it may be, in order to bring out, and execute judgement upon, some hidden evil that may have hitherto lain dormant in the heart. The latter was His wise and faithful purpose in Hezekiah's case.

So far as the ordering of the kingdom was concerned, there can be no doubt but that recent circumstances, and specially the defeat of Sennacherib, would have produced a powerful effect upon the nations around. There was abundant testimony to the fact that the kingdom was well-ordered. Again, the joyful hearts of the children of Israel, as they journeyed home to their own land, would prove very decidedly that the temple service was also well-ordered. In other words, Hezekiah had the testimony of the world *without* and

his brethren *within* as to the soundness and rightness of his ways. This was all most important. It is happy for us when we are not giving to "the world any occasion to speak reproachfully or our brethren to speak suspiciously of us." We should at least know this happiness. But there is far more than even this. God looks more narrowly into our ways than the world or the church. He will not rest satisfied with a well-ordered *kingdom*, nor even a well-ordered *house*, but setting up a still loftier standard, He looks for a well-ordered *heart*.

This, I conceive, is most instructive and searching. When Hezekiah set out upon his public career the first thing he had to direct his attention to was the disorder of his kingdom; the next was the disorder of his house; and last of all, and most searching of all, was the disorder of his *heart*. Now, in the very fact of his being called to submit to the last named trying test, we learn how very far Hezekiah had outstripped even men of more than ordinary grace. Jotham, for example, was never called to such a trial; and why? Because, at the very threshold of his course he proved defective. There was a "howbeit" with regard to him in the mere matter of the kingdom to say nothing of his house or his heart. Not so with regard to Hezekiah; there was no "howbeit" in his case "save in the matter of the ambassadors," i.e. in other words, God had a question to settle with him as to the state of his heart. And may we not say there was but One who could stand the threefold test above alluded to; even He who could say, "I will walk within my *house* with a *perfect* heart."

But whence, may we ask, came the enemy that vanquished the man whom we have hitherto beheld moving onward in the ways of God with such a steady pace? *From Babylon*. Yes; Babylon that old fountain of moral evil, a stream from which poisoned the camp of Israel in Joshua's day. "At that time Merodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a *present* to Hezekiah." (Isa. 39.) Here we have another king attacking Hezekiah: not the king of Assyria with a numerous army; nor the king of terrors with a solemn summons to surrender; but *the king of Babylon with a present*. And, strange as it may seem, the present from Babylon proved too powerful an assailant for the heart of Hezekiah. When

the king of Assyria sent letters to him "he went up into the house of the Lord and spread them before the Lord." Thus he conquered. When summoned to prepare for death, "he turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord." Thus he was raised up. But when the ambassadors from the king of Babylon approached him, "he showed them the house of *his precious things*." *THUS HE FELL*. Solemn — most solemn warning! Hezekiah was off his guard. No prayer — no seeking the Lord — no spiritual perception to detect the hook that lay concealed beneath this gilded bait. Had he gone and spread Merodach's letter before the Lord he would have been raised above the influence of the world's polite attraction as he had before been raised above the influence of its angry threats. He would have found the sanctuary as safe a retreat from the guile of the serpent as it had been from the roar of the lion. But then we have the secret cause of the failure in the sacred commentary on the matter. "Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon.... *God left him* to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." When God leaves a man, a straw is sufficient to upset him.

We, however, may learn a very seasonable lesson from Hezekiah's failure. We may learn that the smile of the world will overcome us when, perhaps, its frown would drive us more closely to the cross. It is far more difficult to deal faithfully with a plausible Gibeonite or a polite anal elegant Agag than with the rugged sons of Anak — the manifest and naturally unamiable enemies of God. Again, it is exceedingly difficult to act faithfully with the people of the world, and, at the same time, be a recipient of their compliments. It requires no small measure of spiritual power to sit at the table and partake of the hospitality of a man of the world, and, at the same time, deal faithfully with him about his soul: "A gift blindeth the wise, and perverted the words of the righteous." (Ex. 23: 8.) The Christian should therefore be independent of, and separated from, the world. It is better, if we be lacking in spiritual power, to keep away, as much as possible, from worldly people, than to mix with them and dishonour the Lord. Abraham would not take anything from the king of Sodom or the sons of Heth. He would not be a debtor to the uncircumcised. Thus, being separated from them, he could be a *living witness* against them.

Now, we can easily imagine how difficult Hezekiah would have found it to introduce the subject of truth to these — noble strangers; he might not like to intrude upon them with such subjects — the time, place, or circumstances might not have seemed exactly suitable; many such thoughts might arise in his mind to hinder him from dealing faithfully with his guests. Nor would the world without, nor yet, perhaps, his brethren within, have been able to detect any thing wrong in his showing them the house of his treasures. But ah! the secret thought was wrong — pride was lurking in the hidden chambers of his heart — instead of telling them about the One who dwelt between the Cherubim — of the splendid deliverance from the hand of the king of Assyria — of the deep lessons learnt at "the gates of the grave," and the pardoning love of God who had "cast all his sins behind his back" — instead of presenting these things before them, "he showed them the house of *his* precious things, the silver and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of *his* armour (which could not defend him from the king of Assyria), and all that was found in *his* treasures: there was nothing in *his* house, nor in all *his* dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." Thus it was all about himself, and nothing about God. Strange, unaccountable forgetfulness! Such is man — a man of God — when left to himself.

But now, that the evil has been fully brought out, not only in God's view but in his own, it is worthy of special notice, the Lord, by His prophet, seeks to lead His servant right onward to the end not only of his kingdom, or of his house, but of himself. "Behold," says He, "the days come that all that is in *thine house*, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be, eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Here, I say, Hezekiah was led to see the end of his kingdom, of his house and himself. All was to go to that very Babylon whose ambassadors had ensnared him. Every thing in which his poor heart might boast before the men of this world must go to ruin. He had presented to the view of the world *his* treasures, and these very treasures the world was about to carry away; but the "peace and truth," or, in other words, the treasures which he had in God, "the

world could neither give nor take away" — it was "a better and an *enduring substance*" because it was "*in heaven*."

Thus we have reached the end of this instructive history. Hezekiah's actings "first and last" have passed before us — we have been led into the secret of his kingdom, of his house, and of his heart — we have travelled with him through a reign of nine and twenty years, and, at the close, we leave him in blessed company "with peace and truth" — we have seen him in most trying circumstances possessing the same unchecked confidence in God; we have seen him before the world and before his brethren; and, with one exception, his path has been "as the path of the just, shining more and more unto the perfect day."

And oh! dear Christian reader, is it not a consolatory reflection for the soul, that when we have travelled to the end of all human things and learnt the end of all earthly glory; yea, moreover, when we have learnt the deep and humbling lesson of our own hearts and the evil thereof, and discovered "the end of all flesh" and of our own flesh amongst the rest — after all this, I say, is it not consolatory to find that "peace and truth" are to be our never-ending portion? — that our gracious God, having "cast all our sins behind his back" — brought us up "from the pit of corruption" and "set our feet upon a rock," will put into our hands a golden harp, in order that, amid the rest and blessedness of His house, we may sing of "peace and truth" throughout the entire of our "day" which, as we know, shall be an eternal one.

"Lord, I believe thou hast prepared,

Unworthy though I be,

For me a blood-bought free reward,

A golden harp for me.

'Tis strung and tuned for endless years,

And formed by power divine,

To sound in God the Fathers ears

No other name but Thine."

2 Chronicles 30: 18-20

The Remnant — Past and Present.

It is at once interesting, instructive, and encouraging to trace through Scripture the history of what is called "The Remnant." We may remark at the outset that the fact of there being a remnant proves the failure of the ostensible witness or professing body, whether Jewish or Christian. If all were faithful there would, of course, be no moral ground for a remnant, nothing to distinguish a few from the general body of professors. The remnant, at any time, will be found to consist of those who feel and own the common failure and ruin, and count on God, and cleave to His Word. These are the great characteristic marks of the remnant in every age. We have failed, but God is faithful, and His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

Now in tracing the history of the remnant in Old Testament times we find that the lower down we go in the nation's history, the richer the display of divine grace; and, further, the deeper the moral gloom, the brighter the flashes of individual faith. This is fraught with the most blessed encouragement for every true-hearted child of God and servant of Christ who feels and owns the ruin of the whole professing Church. It is cheering beyond expression for every faithful soul to be assured that, however the Church has failed, it is the privilege of the individual believer to enjoy as full and precious fellowship with God, and pursue as true a path of discipleship as ever was known in the brightest days of the Church's history. Let us turn to Scripture for illustration.

In 2 Chronicles 30 we have a refreshing and encouraging record of a Passover kept in the reign of Hezekiah, when the visible unity of the nation was broken up; and failure and ruin had come in. We do not attempt to quote the whole passage, much as we should like to do so, for it is most precious and soul-stirring. We merely give the closing lines as bearing upon our thesis.

"So there was great joy in Jerusalem: *for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.*" Here then we have a lovely illustration of the grace of

God meeting those of His people who owned their failure and sin and took their true place in His presence. Hezekiah and those with him were fully convinced of their low condition, and hence they did not presume to keep the Passover in the first month. They availed themselves of the provision of grace, as recorded in Numbers 9, and kept the feast in the second month. "For a multitude of the people . . . had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the Passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon *every one that prepareth his heart to seek God*, the Lord God of his fathers, though . . . not according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord harkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (2 Chr. 30: 18-20).

Here we see divine grace meeting, as it ever does, those who truly confess their failure and weakness. There was no assumption or pretension, no hardness or indifference, no attempt to hide their true condition, no setting up to be all right; no, they took their true place, and cast themselves on that exhaustless grace which never fails to meet a contrite heart.

What was the result? "The children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days *with great gladness*: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably [to the heart] unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness" (2 Chr. 30: 21-23).

Now we may rest assured that all this was most grateful to the heart of Jehovah, God of Israel. True there was weakness, failure, short-coming. Things were not externally what they were in Solomon's day. Doubtless many may have looked upon Hezekiah's acting as presumptuous in convening such an assembly under the circumstances. Indeed, we are told that his touching and beautiful invitation was mocked and laughed to scorn throughout Ephraim, Manasseh, and Zebulun.

Thus it is, alas! too often. The actings of faith are not understood, because the precious grace of God is not understood. But "divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun *humbled themselves*, and came to Jerusalem," and they were richly rewarded by coming in for a feast of fat things such as had not been celebrated since the days of Solomon. There is no limit to the blessing which grace has in store for the broken and contrite heart. If all Israel had responded to Hezekiah's touching appeal, they would have shared in the blessing; but they were *unbroken*, and therefore *unblessed*! Let us all remember this; we may rest assured it has a voice and a needed lesson for us. May we hear and learn!

We shall now pass on to the reign of the pious and devoted king Josiah, when the nation was on the very eve of dissolution. Here we have a very striking and beautiful illustration of our thesis. We do not attempt to go into details, having done so elsewhere.

We shall merely quote the few closing lines. "And the children of Israel that were present kept the Passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. *And there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept*, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this Passover kept" (2 Chr. 35: 17-19).

What a very remarkable testimony! In Hezekiah's Passover we are carried back to the brilliant reign of Solomon; but here we have something brighter still. And if it be asked what it was that threw such a halo of glory around Josiah's Passover, we believe it was the fact of its being the fruit of holy and reverent obedience to the Word of God in the midst of abounding ruin and corruption, error and confusion. The activities of faith in an obedient and devoted heart were thrown into relief by the dark background of the nation's condition.

All this is full of encouragement and comfort for every true lover of Christ. Many might have thought it very presumptuous of Josiah to pursue such a course at such a moment and under such

circumstances; but it was the very reverse of presumption, as we may gather from the blessed message sent to him from the Lord by the mouth of Huldah, the prophetess; "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard; *Because thy heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God*, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before Me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord" (2 Chr. 34: 26-27) .

Here we have the moral basis of Josiah's remarkable career; and most assuredly there was nothing savouring of presumption therein. A contrite heart, weeping eyes, and rent garments are not the accompaniments of presumption or self-confidence. No; they are the precious results of the Word of God acting on the heart and conscience and leading to a course of deep-toned personal devotedness, most cheering and edifying to contemplate. Oh, that there were more of it amongst us! Truly the heart longs for it. May the Word of God so tell upon our whole moral being that instead of yielding to the condition of things around us we may live above it and pass through it as witnesses to the eternal reality of the truth of God and the imperishable virtues of the name of Jesus.

But we must pass on from the interesting history of Josiah, and present some further illustrations of our theme. Hardly had that beloved servant of God passed off the scene when every trace of his blessed work was swept away, and the heavy tide of judgment, long held back in the long-suffering mercy of God, rolled over the land. Jerusalem was laid in ruins, its temple burnt to the ground, and all the people who escaped were carried captive to Babylon, there to hang their harps on the willows and weep over the faded light of other days.

But, blessed forever be the God of all grace, He never leaves Himself without a witness; and hence, during the long and dreary period of Babylonish captivity, we find some most striking and beautiful proofs of the statement that the greater the ruin the richer the grace, and the deeper the gloom the brighter the flashes of individual faith. There was then, as there ever is, "a remnant according to the election of grace" — a little band of devoted men

who loved the Lord and were true to His Word amid the pollutions and abominations of Babylon, and who were prepared to face the fiery furnace and the lions' den for the truth of God.

The opening chapters of the book of Daniel furnish some magnificent results of individual faith and devotedness. Look, for example, at Daniel 2: 46. Where in the history of the nation of Israel have we aught more striking than what is here recorded? Earth's greatest monarch humbled before a captive exile and giving forth this wonderful testimony: "The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret."

But where did Daniel get the power to reveal the king's secret? Verses 17 and 18 supply the lovely answer: "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret." Here we have a prayer-meeting in Babylon. These dear men were of one heart and one mind. They were one in their purpose to refuse the king's meat and wine. They were resolved, by the grace of God, to tread the holy path of separation, though captive exiles in Babylon; and they got together for prayer, and received an abundant answer.

Can aught be finer than this? What an encouragement to the Lord's beloved people in darkest days to hold fast Christ's Word, and not deny His precious name! Is it not most refreshing and edifying to find amid the dark days of Babylonish captivity a few true-hearted men treading in holy fellowship the path of separation and dependence? They stood for God in the king's palace, and God was with them in the furnace and in the lions' den, and conferred upon them the high privilege of standing before the world as the servants of the Most High God. They refused the king's meat; they would not worship the king's image; they kept God's Word and confessed His name utterly regardless of consequences.

They did not say, "We must go with the times; we must do as others do; there is no need to make ourselves singular; we must outwardly conform to the public worship, the religion of the state, and hold our own private opinions all the same; we are not called to

withstand the faith of the nation; being in Babylon, we must conform to Babylon's religion."

Thank God, Daniel and his beloved companions did not adopt this contemptible, time-serving policy. No! and what is more, they did not draw a plea, from the complete wreck of Israel's national polity, for lowering the standard of individual faithfulness. They felt — could not but feel, the ruin. They confessed their sin, and the sin of the nation; they felt that, so far as they were concerned, sackcloth and ashes became them; they would bow down their whole moral being beneath that solemn word, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." All this was, alas, too true; but that was no reason why they should defile themselves with the king's meat, worship the king's image, or give up the worship of the one true and living God. Ah, *God* was before their eyes, and Him they served and obeyed.

All this is full of the most precious teaching for all the Lord's people at the present moment. There are two special evils which we have to guard against. We must beware of ecclesiastical pretension or boasting in mere church position, without an exercised conscience and the holy fear of God. This is a terrible evil, against which every beloved child of God should most sedulously watch. We must never forget that the professing Church is a hopeless wreck, and that any human effort to restore it is a delusion. We are not called, and hence not qualified, to restore it. The Holy Ghost is nevertheless forming the body of Christ, and hastening its completion for the Lord's return.

But, on the other hand, we are not to draw a plea from the ruin of the church for laxity as to truth, or sluggishness in our personal walk. We are in great danger of this. There is no reason whatever why any child of God, or servant of Christ, should do or sanction what is wrong, or continue for an hour in association with aught that has not for its authority, "Thus saith the Lord." "Let *every one* that nameth the name of the Lord *depart* from iniquity." And what then? Stand alone? Do nothing? Not so, thanks and praise to our ever-gracious God! But "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, *with them* that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" — a heart true to Christ and His interests.

But we must pursue our subject, and ask the reader to turn to Neh. 8. We have been looking at the remnant before the captivity and during the captivity; and now we are called to look at them after the captivity; brought back, by the rich mercy of God, into their own beloved land. We shall not attempt to go into details, but just take one weighty fact in illustration of our special thesis — a fact of immense importance for the whole Church of God at the present moment.

We shall quote a few verses of this lovely Scripture: "So they read in the book in *the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading....* And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, *even to understand the words of the law.* And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month.... And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for *since the days of Joshua the son of Nun* unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner."

This is very striking. Here we find a feeble remnant gathered round the Word of God, holding a reading-meeting, and getting to understand the truth and feel its power on the heart and conscience. And what was the result? Nothing less than the celebration of the feast of tabernacles, which had never been kept since the days of Joshua the son of Nun. Throughout the days of the judges, the days of Samuel the prophet, the days of the kings — even the brilliant days of David and Solomon — the feast of tabernacles had never been celebrated. It was reserved for a feeble company of returned exiles to keep, amid the ruins of Jerusalem, this precious and beautiful festival — the type of Israel's glorious future.

Was this presumption? Nay, it was simple obedience to the Word of God. It was written in the Book — written for them; they acted upon it. "And there was very great gladness." There was no

pretension, no setting up to be anything, no boasting, no attempt to hide their true condition; they were a poor, feeble, despised remnant, taking their true place, broken, and contrite, confessing their failure, deeply conscious that it was not with them as it was in the days of Solomon, David, and Joshua. But they heard the Word of God — heard and understood — bowed to its holy authority — kept the feast. "And there was very great gladness." This surely is another striking and beautiful illustration of our theme, that the greater the ruin, the richer the grace; and the deeper the gloom, the brighter the flashes of individual faith. At all times, and in all places, the contrite and confiding heart is met by unqualified, unbounded grace.

We shall now turn, for a moment, to the last page of Old Testament Scripture — the prophecy of Malachi. Many years have rolled by since the bright days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and we have here a most sorrowful picture of Israel's condition. Alas, alas! "the down grade" has been rapidly trodden. It is the same sad story — "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" Let us quote a few sentences.

"Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that ye say the table of the Lord is contemptible.... Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for naught? neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for naught. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.... Ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even His meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord" (Mal. 1: 7, 10, 12-13; see also Mal. 3: 5-9).

What a deplorable condition of things! It is simply heart-breaking to contemplate. The public worship of God brought into utter contempt; the ministers of religion working only for hire; venality and corruption in connection with the holy service of God; every form of moral pravity practiced amongst the people. In short, it was a scene of deep moral gloom, depressing beyond expression to all who cared for the Lord's interests.

Yet, even in the midst of this terrible scene, we have a most touching and exquisite illustration of our thesis. As ever, there is a remnant — a beloved company who honoured and loved the Lord, and found in Him their centre, their object, their delight. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord harkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels [My special treasure]; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

How lovely is all this! What a contrast to the general condition of things! We may range through the entire history of the nation, and find nothing like this. Where do we read of "a book of remembrance written before the Lord"? Nowhere; not even amidst the brilliant victories of Joshua and David, or the splendours of Solomon. It may be said there was no need. That is not the point. What we have to ponder is the striking fact that the words and ways of this feeble remnant, in the very midst of abounding wickedness, were so refreshing to the heart of God that He had a book of remembrance written about them. We may safely assert that the communings of these beloved ones were more grateful to the heart of God than the singers and trumpeters in Solomon's day. "They spake often one to another." "They feared the Lord, and thought upon His name." There was individual devotedness, personal attachment; they loved the Lord; and this drew them together.

Nothing can be more lovely. Would there were more of it in our midst! Those dear people were not doing anything very great or showy in man's view; but ah, they loved the Lord, they thought of Him, and their common attachment to Him drew them together to speak of Him; and this gave a charm to their reunions which gratified and refreshed the heart of God! It stood out in bright and beautiful relief from the dark background of hirelingism and heartless routine with which they were surrounded. They were not bound together by certain views or opinions which they held in common, though doubtless they had their views and opinions; neither were they held together by ritualistic services or ceremonial observances; no, they had something far better and higher than any

of these things; they were drawn and knit together by deep-toned personal devotedness to the Lord, and this was agreeable to His heart. He was weary with the whole system of ritualism, but refreshed by the genuine devotedness of a few precious souls who got together as often as they could to speak one to another, and to encourage one another in the Lord.

Would that there were more of this amongst us! We long for it, and our one earnest desire in writing this paper is to promote it. We greatly dread the withering, paralysing influence of mere formalism or religious routine — getting into a groove, and going on day after day, week after week, year after year, in a poor, cold, formal manner, most offensive to the loving heart of our adorable Lord and Saviour, who desires to be surrounded by a company of wholehearted, devoted followers, true to His name, true to His Word, true to one another for His sake, seeking to serve Him in every right way, while ardently looking out for His blessed appearing. May the Spirit of God work mightily in the hearts of all His people, healing, restoring, reviving, and maintaining a faithful company to welcome the heavenly Bridegroom! Let us cry to our gracious God day and night for this.

I am anxious to present two or three illustrations drawn from the precious pages of the New Testament. In the opening of Luke's Gospel we have a lovely picture of a remnant in the midst of a hollow, heartless profession. We listen to the spiritual heart utterances of Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Simeon. We read of Anna the prophetess, who spoke of Jesus to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. I remember hearing my beloved and revered old friend J.N.D. [Darby] say in reference to Anna, "I am sure I do not know how she managed to get at them at all, but she did." Yes, she did, because she loved the Lord and loved His dear people, and delighted to find them out and speak of Him. It is just our beloved remnant in Malachi over again. Nothing can be more lovely or refreshing. It was the exquisite and fragrant fruit of deep-toned love to the Lord in contrast with the wearisome forms of dead religiousness.

We shall now pass on to the Epistle of Jude. Here we find apostate Christendom in all its appalling forms of wickedness, just

as in Malachi we had apostate Judaism. But our object just now is not apostate Christendom, but the Christian remnant. Thanks and praise to our gracious God, there is always a remnant marked off from the mass of corrupt profession, and characterised by genuine attachment to Christ, to His interests, and to every member of His beloved body.

It is to this remnant that the inspired apostle addresses his solemn and weighty Epistle. It is not to any special assembly, but "To them that are *sanctified* by God the Father, and *preserved* in Jesus Christ, *called: mercy* unto you, and *peace*, and *love*, be multiplied."

Blessed position! Precious portion! "Separated," "preserved," "called" — this is the position. "Mercy," "peace," "love" — this is the portion. And all this made sure to every true-hearted child of God on the face of the earth ere a single word is written about the overwhelming tide of apostasy which was so soon to roll over the whole professing Church.

We repeat, and would emphasise the expression, "to every true-hearted child of God." As in Israel of old, so in the professing Church, the remnant will be found to consist of those who are true to Christ, hold fast His Word in the face of everything, are devoted to His precious interests, and who love His appearing. In a word, it must be a living reality, and not mere church-membership or nominal fellowship here or there, with this or that. Moreover it is not assuming to be, but really being, of the remnant-not the name, but the spiritual power; so the apostle says, "I will know, not the speech . . . but the power." A weighty word for us all.

And now let us turn for a few moments to the precious words of exhortation addressed to the Christian remnant. May the Spirit clothe them with power to our souls!

"But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." They are directed to the Holy Scriptures, and to these alone. It is not to human tradition of any kind; not to the Fathers; not to the decrees of general councils; not to the commandments and doctrines of men; not to any

of these, or all put together, which can only bewilder, perplex, and mislead; but to the pure and precious Word of God, that perfect revelation which in His infinite goodness He has put into our hands, and which can make a little child "wise unto salvation" and make a man "*perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim. 3).

The Lord be praised for this unspeakable favour! No human language can set forth the importance of having a divinely settled authority for our path. All we want is to be absolutely and completely governed by it, to have it hidden in our hearts, acting on our consciences, forming our character, governing our conduct *in everything*. To give the Word of God this place is one of the marked characteristics of the Christian remnant. It is not the worthless, baseless formulary, "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." Protestantism is not the Church of God, it is not the Christian remnant.

The Reformation was the result of a blessed work of the Spirit of God; but Protestantism, in all its denominational branches, is what man has made of it. In it human organisation has displaced the living work of the Spirit, and the form of godliness has displaced the power of individual faith. No mere ism, call it what you please, can ever be regarded as the Church of God or the Christian remnant. It is of the very utmost moral importance to see this. The professing Church has utterly failed, its corporate unity is hopelessly gone, just as we see in the history of Israel. But the Christian remnant is made up of all those who truly feel and own the ruin, who are governed by the Word and led by the Spirit, in separation from what is contrary to that Word, to wait for their Lord.

Let us see how all this comes out in Jude's address to the remnant. "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Here then we have a loved view of the true Christian remnant and their occupation among themselves. Nothing can be more beautiful. We may be asked, to whom does this charming passage apply? We answer, to those — whoever and wherever they are —

addressed in the first verse of the Epistle: "To them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." Nothing can be more simple or more blessed. It is perfectly obvious that these words do not and cannot apply to mere professors; neither can they apply to any ecclesiastical body under the sun. In a word, they apply to the living members of the body of Christ. All such should be found together building up themselves on their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping themselves in the love of God, and looking out for their Lord.

This is the Christian remnant, just as in Malachi 3 we have the Jewish remnant. Nothing can be more lovely. It is the position in which all true Christians should be found. There is no pretension to setting themselves up to be anything, no attempt to ignore the sad and solemn fact of the utter ruin of the professing Church. It is a Christian remnant in the midst of Christendom's ruins, true to the Person of Christ, true to His Word; knit together in true Christian love — not the love of sect, party, clique, or coterie, but love in the Spirit, love to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; love expressing itself in true devotedness to Christ and His precious interests; and loving ministry to all who belong to Him and seek to reflect Him in all their ways. It is not resting in mere position, regardless of condition — a terrible snare of the devil — but a healthy union of the two in a life characterised by sound principle and gracious practice; the kingdom of God established in the heart and developing itself in the whole practical career.

Such then is the position, the condition, the practice of the true Christian remnant; and we may rest assured that, where these things are realized and carried out, there will be as rich enjoyment of Christ, as full communion with God, and as bright a testimony to the glorious truth of New Testament Christianity as ever was known in the brightest days of the Church's history. In a word, there will be that which will glorify the name of God, gratify the heart of Christ, and tell with living power on the hearts and consciences of men. May God, in His infinite goodness, give us to see these bright realities in this dark and evil day — a fresh illustration of the soul-stirring fact that the greater the ruin, the richer the grace; the deeper the gloom, the brighter the flashes of individual faith.

Look for a moment at the address to the fourth of the seven churches, as given in the second chapter of Revelation. The church of Thyatira gives us the history of the Church during those long, dreary centuries of the Middle Ages, when gross darkness covered the earth, when poverty — that darkest moral blot — prevailed in the well-known character of Jezebel.

In the address to this assembly we find a marked change, indicated by three plain facts — namely: first, a remnant is for the first time addressed: secondly, the Lord's coming is for the first time introduced; and, thirdly, the hearing ear is no longer looked for in the assembly at large, but in the overcomer. Now these facts prove beyond all question that in Thyatira all hope of corporate restoration is abandoned. "I gave her space to repent . . . and she repented not." The case is hopeless as regards the professing body. But here the remnant is singled out and cheered — not with the hope of a converted world or a restored church but with the bright and blessed hope of the Lord's coming as the bright and morning star. "But unto you I say, the remnant [The word rendered "remnant" in the above passage is *loipois*, and is from the same root as the word "remnant" in Rom 11: 5, which is *limma*. Both are from *leipo*, to leave.] in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine [*didachen* the same root as *didaskhein* what Jezebel was doing], and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have hold fast till I come."

Here then we have a deeply interesting view of the Christian remnant. It is not the church restored, but a distinct company clear of Jezebel's teaching and Satan's depths, and going on to the end. It is of the utmost importance that the reader should be clear in reference to the fact that the last four churches run on synchronously to the end. It simplifies the whole subject immensely, and gives us a very definite, practical view of the Christian remnant. There is no mention of a remnant until we get to Thyatira. Then all hope of corporate restoration is given up. This simple fact overturns the church of Rome from its very foundations. It is presented to us as an apostate and idolatrous system, threatened with the judgment of God: and a remnant are addressed who have nothing to do with her. So much for the boasted, universal, infallible church of Rome.

But what of Sardis? Is this the church restored? Nothing of the kind. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and *art dead*." This is not a restored or reformed church, but *threatened* with Christ's coming as *a thief*, instead of being cheered with "the bright and morning star." In a word, it is Protestantism with "a name," but the works "not perfect before God." And what then? The Christian remnant. "*A few names* even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and *they* [He does not say *thou*] shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy." We have here a vivid and most striking contrast between dead, cold, nominal profession and a few true-hearted, earnest lovers of Christ — between form and power, death and life.

In the last two assemblies we have the contrast continued, enlarged, and enforced. Philadelphia gives us a most precious picture of a company of true Christians, humble, lowly, feeble, but true to Christ; holding fast His Word, and not denying His name — Christ and His Word treasured in the heart and confessed in the life — a living reality, not a lifeless form. The moral beauty of this is excellent. The very contemplation of it is refreshing and edifying indeed. In short, it is Christ reproduced by the Holy Ghost in a beloved remnant. There is no pretension to be anything, no assumption of great things. Christ is all: His Word, His name, how precious! We seem to have gathered up and concentrated here the lovely moral traits of the various remnants that have come under our notice, brought out in full blow and yielding a fragrant perfume.

Now all this is most grateful to the heart of Christ. It is not a question of great service rendered, mighty works performed, anything striking or splendid in the eyes of men. No; it is something far more precious to the Lord, namely, the deep, calm, thorough appreciation of Himself and His precious Word. This is far more to Him than the most showy services and costly sacrifices. What He looks for is a place in the heart. Without this all is worthless. But the very feeblest breathing of the heart's affections after Himself is most precious.

Let us harken to our adorable Lord as He pours out His loving heart to this dear Philadelphian company — this true Christian remnant. "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and

shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept *My word*, and hast not denied *My name*. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan" — those who take their stand on the boasted ground of traditional religion — "which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that *I have loved thee*" — precious, blessed fact, the basis and guarantee of all, for time and eternity! — "Because thou hast kept the word of *My patience* [not *My power*], I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (*tous katoikountas*), those finding their home on the earth, in contrast to those whose citizenship is in Heaven).

The Lord Christ most graciously pledges Himself to keep His beloved assembly from the terrible hour of trial that is coming upon this whole scene. He will have His heavenly people with Himself in their heavenly home ere a single seal is opened, a trumpet sounded, or a vial poured out. All praise to His name for this bright, blessed, tranquillising, joyful hope! May we live in the power of it while we wait for the full fruition!

But we must quote the remainder of this most exquisite address, so full of comfort and consolation. "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of *My God*, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of *My God*, and the name of the city of *My God*, new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from *My God*: and *My new name*."

Nothing can exceed the grace that shines in all this. Jehovah spoke gracious words to His beloved remnant in the days of Malachi. "*They shall be Mine . . .* in that day when I make up *My jewels*; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all *the proud*, yea, and all that *do wickedly*, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that" —

what? That have done great things, made great sacrifices, made a great profession, had a great name? No; but — "*fear My name* shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3: 17 — Mal. 4: 3).

There are points of similarity and points of contrast in the Jewish and Christian remnants which we cannot go into just now, inasmuch as our object in referring to both is to illustrate our special theme, namely, that in darkest days we find a devoted remnant dear to the heart of God, the heart of Christ, and who are addressed in the most tender and endearing terms, comforted by the most precious assurances, and cheered by the brightest hopes. This we believe to be the special subject laid upon the heart to present to the whole Church of God, for the purpose of encouraging every member of the beloved body of Christ on the face of the earth to stand apart from all that is contrary to His mind as revealed in His Word, and to be found in the position, attitude and spirit of the true Christian remnant, waiting for the coming of our beloved Lord.

One point marks the distinction between the two remnants in the clearest way. It is this: the Jewish remnant is cheered by the hope of the Sun of righteousness; whereas to the Christian remnant is granted the far higher, brighter and sweeter privilege of looking out for the bright and morning Star. A little child can understand the difference between these two things. The morning star appears in the heavens long before the sun rises; and in like manner the Church will meet her Lord as "the bright and morning Star" before the beams of the Sun of righteousness fall in healing power on the God-fearing remnant of Israel.

And now a word, in conclusion, as to Laodicea. Nothing can be more vivid or striking than the contrast between it and Philadelphia in every respect. We have here the last phase of the professing Christian body. It is just about to be spewed out as something insufferably nauseous to Christ. It is not a question of gross immorality. It may to man's eye present a very respectable appearance; but to the heart of Christ its condition is most repulsive.

It is characterised by lukewarmness and indifference. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth."

How awfully solemn to find the professing Church in such a condition! And to think how soon we pass from the attractions of Philadelphia — so grateful to the heart of Christ, so refreshing to His spirit — to the withering atmosphere of Laodicea, where there is not a single redeeming feature! We have heartless indifference as to Christ and His interests, combined with the most deplorable self-congratulation. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and *have need of nothing*; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

How solemn is all this! People boasting of their riches, and of their having need of nothing, and Christ outside. They have lost the sense of divine righteousness, symbolised by "gold," and practical human righteousness, as symbolised by "white raiment," and yet full of themselves and their doings — the very reverse of the dear Philadelphian company. There, He reproves nothing; here, He commends nothing. There, Christ is all; here, He is actually outside, and the Church is all. In a word, it is perfectly appalling to contemplate. We are just at the close. We have got to the last solemn phase of the Church as God's witness on the earth.

Yet even here, in the face of this most deplorable condition of things, the infinite grace and changeless love of the heart of Christ shine out in all their undimmed lustre. He is outside; this tells what the Church is. But He is knocking, calling, waiting: this tells what He is, eternal and universal homage to His name! "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." The gold, the white raiment and the eyesalve are offered. Love has various offices to discharge, various characters in which to clothe itself; but it is the same love still — "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever," even though it has to "rebuke and chasten." Here His

attitude and His action speak volumes, both as to the Church and as to Himself. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: *if any man* hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to *him*, and will sup with him, and *he with Me*."

[Here it is not to the outside sinner, but to the professing Church the Lord makes this most solemn and weighty appeal. It is not Christ knocking at the door of the sinner's heart is true as that is also), but at the door of those in the professing Church. How telling! how suggestive! Oh, may professing Christians ponder it!]

In the church of Sardis the remnant is spoken of as "a few names"; in Laodicea there is an "if" as to one; but even if there be a single hearing ear, if there be one to open the door, that one is assured of the high privilege, the immense favour, of supping with Christ — of having that precious one as Guest and Host. "I with him, and he with Me." When the corporate witness has reached the very lowest point, individual faithfulness is rewarded with intimate fellowship with the heart of Christ. Such is the infinite and everlasting love of our beloved Saviour and Lord. Oh, who would not trust Him and praise Him and love Him and serve Him?

And now, beloved Christian reader, in taking leave of you, I would earnestly and affectionately entreat you to join in petition to our ever-gracious God to stir up the hearts of His beloved people all over the world to seek a more pronounced, whole-hearted, devoted discipleship; to turn away from everything contrary to His Word; to be true to His Word and to His name in this dark and evil day; and thus realize the truth, which has passed before us in this paper, that *the greater the ruin, the richer the grace; the deeper the gloom, the brighter the outshining of individual faith.*

P.S. — I feel I must not let this paper go forth without adding a word on the immense importance of keeping up a full, clear, earnest gospel testimony. "Do the work of an evangelist" is a charge given by the beloved apostle from his prison at Rome to his dear son Timothy, in view of the total ruin of the professing Church; and truly the circumstances under which these words were penned impart a touching interest to them. Come what may, Timothy was to continue to announce the glad tidings of God's salvation. He might

be tempted to give up in despair, and say, "All is going to pieces, people will not listen to the gospel" — "will not endure sound doctrine."

Faith says, "No; we must never give up. God's gospel must be preached to every creature under heaven. And even though men reject it, God is glorified and His heart is refreshed by the precious message of His love being told out in the ears of perishing sinners." We would encourage the heart of every beloved evangelist on the face of the earth by reminding him that however the Church has failed as God's witness to the world, yet the precious gospel tells out what He is to every poor, broken-hearted, bankrupt sinner who will only trust Him. The thought of this has cheered us during forty-eight years of evangelistic work, when the condition of the Church was heart-breaking to contemplate.

In speaking of the work of an evangelist, we must not confine it to public halls and rooms, which, of course, demand a distinct gift from the Head of the Church. We believe it is the sweet privilege of every child of God to be in a condition of soul to tell the glad tidings to individual souls in private life; and we must confess we long to see more of this. It matters not what our position in life or sphere of action may be, we should earnestly and prayerfully seek the salvation of those with whom we come in contact. If we fail in this, we are not in communion with the heart of God and the mind of Christ. In the Gospels and Acts we see a great deal of this lovely individual work. "Philip findeth Nathanael." "Andrew first findeth his own brother Simon."

We want more of this earnest, beautiful, personal work in private. It is refreshing to the heart of God. We are apt to get into a groove and rest satisfied with asking people to come to public halls and rooms — all right and good in its place, and most important. We would not pen a line to detract from the value of this service; but at the same time we cannot help feeling our sad deficiency in loving, personal dealing with souls. But this requires nearness to God in our inward life; which may well cause serious searching of our hearts before God, for it is the root of our deficiency.

May the gracious Lord stir up the hearts of all His beloved people to a more lively interest in the blessed work of evangelization, at home and abroad, in public and in private!

2 Chronicles 34 - 35.

The Life and Times of Josiah.

PART 1

Two thousand four hundred years have rolled away since king Josiah lived and reigned; but his history is pregnant with instruction, which can never lose its freshness or its power. The moment at which he ascended the throne of his fathers was one of peculiar gloom and heaviness. The tide of corruption, swollen by many a tributary stream, had risen to the highest point; and the sword of judgement, long held back in divine patience and long suffering, was about to fall in terrible severity upon the city of David. The brilliant reign of Hezekiah had been followed by a long and dreary period of fifty-five years under the sway of his son Manasseh; and albeit the rod of correction had proved effectual in leading this great sinner to repentance and amendment, yet no sooner had the sceptre fallen from his hand than it was seized by his godless and impenitent son Amon, who "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself: but Amon trespassed more and more. And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house.... And the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead" (2 Chr. 33: 22-25).

Thus, then, Josiah, a child of eight years, found himself on the throne of David, surrounded by the accumulated evils and errors of his father and his grandfather — yea, by forms of corruption which had been introduced by no less a personage than Solomon himself. If the reader will just turn for a moment to 2 Kings 23, he will find a marvellous picture of the condition of things at the opening of Josiah's history. There were "idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places, in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; those also that

burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven."

Reader, ponder this! Only think of kings of Judah, successors of David, ordaining priests to burn incense to Baal! Bear in mind too that each of these kings of Judah was responsible to "write him a copy of the book of the law," which he was to keep by him, and in which he was to "*read all the days of his life*, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep *all the words of this law*, and those statutes to do them" (See Deut. 17: 18-19). Alas! how sadly had they departed from "all the words of the law," when they could actually set about ordaining priests to burn incense to false gods!

But further, there were "horses that the kings of Judah had given to *the sun*," and that, moreover, "at the entering in of the house of the Lord," and "chariots of the sun," and "high places which *Solomon* the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon."

All this is most solemn, and worthy of the serious consideration of the Christian reader. We certainly ought not to pass it over as a mere fragment of ancient history. It is not as though we were reading the historic records of Babylon, of Persia, of Greece, or of Rome. We should not marvel at the kings of those nations burning incense to Baal, ordaining idolatrous priests, and worshipping the host of heaven; but when we see kings of Judah, the sons and successors of David, children of Abraham, men who had access to the book of the law of God, and who were responsible to make that book the subject of their profound and constant study — when we see such men falling under the power of dark and debasing superstition, it sounds in our ears a warning voice, to which we cannot with impunity refuse to give heed. We should bear in mind that all these things have been written for our learning; and although it may be said that we are not in danger of being led to burn incense to Baal, or to worship the host of heaven, yet we may be assured we have need to attend to the admonitions and warnings with which the Holy Ghost has furnished us in the history of God's ancient people. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they

are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10: 11). These words of the inspired apostle, though directly referring to the actings of Israel in the wilderness, may nevertheless apply to the entire history of that people — a history fraught with the deepest instruction from first to last.

But how are we to account for all those gross and terrible evils into which Solomon and his successors were drawn? What was their origin? *Neglect of the Word of God*. This was the source of all the mischief and all the sorrow. Let professing Christians remember this; let the whole Church of God remember it. The neglect of the Holy Scriptures was the fruitful source of all those errors and corruptions which blot the page of Israel's history, and which brought down upon them many heavy strokes of Jehovah's governmental rod. "Concerning the works of men, by the word of Thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Ps. 17: 4). "From a *child* thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect (*artios*), throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 15-17).

In these two precious quotations we have the Word of God presented in its twofold virtue; it not only perfectly preserves us from evil, but perfectly furnishes us unto all good, it keeps us from the paths of the destroyer, and guides us in the ways of God.

How important, then, is the study — the diligent, earnest, prayerful study of Holy Scripture! How needful to cultivate a spirit of reverential submission, in all things, to the authority of the Word of God! Mark how continually and how earnestly this was impressed upon the ancient people of God. How often were such accents as the following sounded in their ears! — "Now therefore harken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.... Behold, I have taught you statutes and

judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep, therefore, and do them; *for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations*, which shall hear all the statutes, and say, Surely, this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? *Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently*, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deut. 4: 1-9).

Let it be carefully noticed here, that "wisdom and understanding" consist simply in having the commandments of God treasured in the heart. This, moreover, was to be the basis of Israel's moral greatness, in view of the nations around them. It was not the learning of the schools of Egypt, or of the Chaldeans. No; it was the knowledge of the Word of God, and attention thereto — the spirit of implicit obedience in all things to the holy statutes and judgments of the Lord their God. This was Israel's wisdom; this their true and real greatness; this their impregnable bulwark against every foe — their moral safeguard against every evil.

And does not the self-same thing hold good with respect to God's people at the present moment? Is not obedience to the Word of God our wisdom, our safeguard, and the foundation of all true moral greatness? Assuredly. Our wisdom is to obey. The obedient soul is wise, safe, happy, and fruitful. As it was, so it is. If we study the history of David and his successors, we shall find (without so much as a single exception) that those who yielded obedience to the commandments of God were safe, happy, prosperous, and influential. And so it will ever be. Obedience will always yield its own precious and fragrant fruits — not that its fruits should be our motive for rendering obedience; we are called to be obedient, irrespective of everything.

Now it is obvious that in order to be obedient to the Word of God, we must be acquainted with it, and in order to be acquainted with it, we must carefully study it. And how should we study it?

With an earnest desire to understand its contents, with profound reverence for its authority, and with an honest purpose to obey its dictates, cost what it may. If we have grace to study Scripture in some small degree after this fashion, we may expect to grow in knowledge and wisdom.

But alas! there is a fearful amount of ignorance of Scripture in the professing church. We are deeply impressed with a sense of this; and we may as well, at this point, just tell the reader that our main object in calling his attention to the subject of "Josiah and his times" is to wake up in his soul an intense desire after a closer acquaintance with God's holy Word, and a more entire bowing down of his whole moral being — heart, conscience, and understanding — to that perfect standard.

We feel the commanding importance of this subject, and we must discharge what we believe to be a sacred duty to the souls of our readers and to the truth of God. The powers of darkness are abroad. The enemy is succeeding to an appalling extent in drawing hearts after various forms of error and evil, in casting dust in the eyes of God's people, and in blinding the minds of men. True we have not got Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom; but we have ritualism, infidelity, spiritualism, etc. We have not to cry against burning incense to Baal, and worshipping the host of heaven, but we have something far more ensnaring and dangerous. We have the ritualist, with his sensuous and attractive rites and ceremonies; we have the rationalist, with his learned and plausible reasonings — we have the spiritualist, with his boasted converse with the spirits of the departed — and what multitude of other delusions and insidious attacks upon the truth!

We doubt if the minds of Christians generally are alive to the real character and extent of these formidable influences. There are at this moment millions of souls throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church who are building their hopes for eternity upon the sandy foundation of ordinances, rites, and ceremonies. There is a very marked return to the traditions of the fathers, as they are called; an intense longing after those things which gratify the senses — music, painting, architecture, vestments, lights, incense — all the appliances, in short, of a gorgeous and sensuous religion. The

theology, the worship, and the discipline of the various churches of the Reformation are found insufficient to meet the religious cravings of the people. They are too severely simple to satisfy hearts that long for something tangible on which to lean for support and comfort — something to feed the senses, and fan the flame of devotion.

Hence the strong tendency of the religious mind in the direction of what is called ritualism. If the soul has not got hold of *the truth*, if there is not the living link with Christ, if the supreme authority of Holy Scripture be not set up in the heart, there is no safeguard against the powerful and fascinating influences of ceremonial religiousness. The most potent efforts of mere intellectualism, eloquence, logic, all the varied charms of literature, are found to be utterly insufficient to hold that class of minds to which we are now referring. They must have the forms and offices of religion; to these they will flock; around these they will gather; on these they will build.

It is painfully interesting to mark the efforts put forth in various quarters to act upon the masses and keep the people together. It is very evident to the thoughtful Christian that those who put forth such efforts must be sadly deficient in that profound faith in the power of the Word of God and of the cross of Christ which swayed the heart of the apostle Paul. They cannot be fully aware of the solemn fact that Satan's grand object is to keep souls in ignorance of divine revelation, to hide from them the glory of the cross and of the person of Christ. For this end he is using ritualism, rationalism, and spiritualism now, just as he used Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom in the days of Josiah. "There is nothing new under the sun." The devil has ever hated the truth of God, and he will leave no stone unturned to keep it from acting on the heart of man. Hence it is that he has rites and ceremonies for one man, the powers of reason for another; and when men tire of both, and begin to sigh for something satisfying, he leads them into converse and communion with the spirits of the departed. By all alike are souls led away from the Holy Scriptures, and from the blessed Saviour which those Scriptures reveal.

It is solemn and affecting beyond expression to think of all this, and not less so to contemplate the lethargy and indifference of

those who profess to have the truth. We do not stop to inquire what it is that ministers to this lethargic state of many professors. That is not our object. We desire, by the grace of God, to see them thoroughly roused out of it, and to this end it is that we call their attention to the influences that are abroad, and to the only divine safeguard against them. We cannot but feel deeply for our children, growing up in such an atmosphere as that which at present surrounds us, and which will become yet darker and darker. We long to see more earnestness on the part of Christians in seeking to store the minds of the young with the precious and soul-saving knowledge of the Word of God. The child Josiah, and the child Timothy, should incite us to greater diligence in the instruction of the young, whether in the bosom of the family, in the Sunday school, or in any way we can reach them. It will not do for us to fold our arms, and say, "When God's time comes, our children will be converted; and till then, our efforts are useless." This is a fatal mistake. "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11). He blesses our prayerful efforts in the instruction of our children. And further, who can estimate the blessing of being early led in the right way — of having the character formed amid holy influences, and the mind stored with what is true and pure and lovely? On the other hand, who will undertake to set forth the evil consequences of allowing our children to grow up in ignorance of divine things? Who can portray the evils of a polluted imagination — of a mind stored with vanity, folly, and falsehood — of a heart familiarised from infancy with scenes of moral degradation? We do not hesitate to say that Christians incur very heavy and awful responsibility in allowing the enemy to preoccupy the minds of their children at the very period when they are most plastic and susceptible.

True, there must be the quickening power of the Holy Ghost. It is as true of the children of Christians as of any other that they "must be born again." We all understand this. But does this fact touch the question of our responsibility in reference to our children? Is it to cripple our energies or hinder our earnest efforts? Assuredly not. We are called upon by every argument, divine and human, to shield our precious little ones from every evil influence, and to train them in that which is holy and good. And not only should we so act in respect to our own children, but also in respect to the thousands

around us, who are like sheep having no shepherd, and who may each say, alas, with too much truth, "No man careth for my soul."

May the foregoing pages be used by God's Spirit to act powerfully on the hearts of all who may read them, that so there may be a real awakening to a sense of our high and holy responsibilities to the souls around, and a shaking off of that terrible deadness and coldness over which we all have to mourn.

PART 2

In studying the history of Josiah and his times, we learn one special and priceless lesson, namely, *the value and authority of the Word of God*. It would be utterly impossible for human language to set forth the vast importance of such a lesson — a lesson for every age, for every clime, for every condition — for the individual believer and for the whole Church of God. The supreme authority of Holy Scripture should be deeply impressed on every heart. It is the only safeguard against the many forms of error and evil which abound on every hand. Human writings, no doubt, have their value; they may interest the mind as a reference, but they are perfectly worthless as authority.

We need to remember this. There is a strong tendency in the human mind to lean upon human authority. Hence it has come to pass that millions throughout the professing Church have virtually been deprived altogether of the Word of God, from the fact that they have lived and died under the delusion that they could not know it to be the Word of God apart from human authority. Now this is in reality, throwing the Word of God overboard. If that Word is of no avail without man's authority, then, we maintain, it is not God's Word at all. It does not matter, in the smallest degree, what the authority is, the effect is the same. God's Word is declared to be insufficient without something of man to give the certainty that it is God that is speaking.

This is a most dangerous error, and its root lies far deeper in the heart than many of us are aware. It has often been said to us, when quoting passages of Scripture, "How do you know that that is the Word of God?" What is the point of such a question? Plainly to

overthrow the authority of the Word. The heart that could suggest such an inquiry does not want to be governed by Holy Scripture at all. The will is concerned. Here lies the deep secret. There is the consciousness that the Word condemns something that the heart wants to hold and cherish, and hence the effort to set the Word aside altogether.

But how are we to know that the book which we call the Bible is the Word of God? We reply, It carries its own credentials with it. It bears its own evidence upon every page, in every paragraph, in every line. True, it is only by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the divine Author of the book, that the evidence can be weighed and the credentials appreciated. But we do not want man's voice to accredit God's book; or, if we do, we are most assuredly on infidel ground as regards divine revelation. If God cannot speak directly to the heart — if He cannot give the assurance that it is He Himself who speaks, then where are we? whither shall we turn? If God cannot make Himself heard and understood, can man do it better? — can he improve upon God? Can man's voice give us more certainty? Can the authority of the Church, the decrees of general councils, the judgement of the fathers, the opinion of the doctors, give us more certainty than God Himself? If so, we are just as completely at sea — just as thoroughly in the dark as though God had not spoken at all. Of course, if God has not spoken, we are completely in the dark; but if He has spoken, and yet we cannot know His voice without man's authority to accredit it, where lies the difference? Is it not plain that if God in His great mercy has given us a revelation, it must be sufficient of itself; and on the other hand that any revelation which is not sufficient of itself cannot possibly be divine? And further, is it not equally plain that if we cannot believe what God says because He says it, we have no safer ground to go upon when man presumes to affix his accrediting seal?

Let us not be misunderstood. What we insist upon is this: the all-sufficiency of a divine revelation apart from and above all human writings — ancient, medieval, or modern. We value human writings; we value sound criticism; we value profound and accurate scholarship; we value the light of true science and philosophy; we value the testimony of pious travellers who have sought to throw

light upon the sacred text; we value all those books that open up to us the intensely interesting subject of biblical antiquities; in short, we value everything that tends to aid us in the study of the Holy Scriptures: but after all, we return with deeper emphasis to our assertion as to the all-sufficiency and supremacy of the Word of God. That Word must be received on its own divine authority, without any human recommendation, or else it is not the Word of God to us. We believe that God can give us the certainty in our own souls that the Holy Scriptures are, in very deed, His own Word. If He does not give it, no man can; and if He does, no man need. Thus the inspired apostle says to his son Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and *hast been assured of* knowing of *whom* thou hast learned; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3: 14-15).

How did Timothy know that the Holy Scriptures were the Word of God? He knew it by divine teaching. He knew of whom he had learned. Here lay the secret. There was a living link between his soul and God, and he recognized in Scripture the very voice of God. Thus it must ever be. It will not do merely to be convinced in the intellect, by human arguments, human evidences, and human apologies, that the Bible is the Word of God; we must know its power in the heart and on the conscience by divine teaching; and when this is the case, we shall no more need human proofs of the divinity of the book than we need a rushlight at noonday to prove that the sun is shining. We shall then believe what God says because He says it, and not because man accredits it, nor because we feel it. "Abraham *believed God*, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." He did not want to go to the Chaldeans, or to the Egyptians, in order to find out from them if what he had heard was in reality the Word of God. No; he knew whom he had believed, and this gave him holy stability. He could say, beyond all question, "God has established a link between my soul and Himself, by means of His Word, which no power of earth or hell can ever snap." This is the true ground for every believer — man, woman, or child, in all ages and under all circumstances. This was the ground for Abraham and Josiah, for Luke and Theophilus, for Paul and Timothy; and it must be the ground for the writer and the reader of these words, else

we shall never be able to stand against the rising tide of infidelity, which is sweeping away the very foundations on which thousands of professors are reposing.

However, we may well inquire, can a merely national profession, a hereditary faith, an educational creed, sustain the soul in the presence of an audacious scepticism that reasons about everything and believes nothing? Impossible! We must be able to stand before the sceptic, the rationalist, and the infidel, and say, in all the calmness and dignity of a divinely wrought faith, "*I know whom I have believed.*" Then we shall be little moved by such books as, "The Phases of Faith," "Essays and Reviews," "Broken Lights," "Ecce Homo," or "Colenso." They will be no more to us than gnats in the sunshine. They cannot hide from our souls the heavenly beams of our Father's revelation. God has spoken, and His voice reaches the heart. It makes itself heard above the din and confusion of this world, and all the strife and controversy of professing Christians. It gives rest and peace, strength and fixedness, to the believing heart and mind. The opinions of men may perplex and confound. We may not be able to thread our way through the labyrinths of human systems of theology; but God's voice speaks in Holy Scripture — speaks to the heart — speaks to *me*. This is life and peace. It is all I want. Human writings may now go for what they are worth, seeing I have all I want in the ever-flowing fountain of inspiration — the peerless, precious volume of my God.

But let us now turn to Josiah, and see how ill that we have been dwelling upon finds its illustration in his life and times.

"Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign" (2 Chr. 34: 1). This tells a tale as to the condition and ways of God's people. Josiah's father had been murdered by his own servants, after a brief and evil reign of two years, in the twenty-fourth year of his age. Such things ought not to have been. They were the sad fruit of sin and folly — the humiliating proofs of Judah's departure from Jehovah. But God was above all; and although we should not have expected ever to find a child of eight years of age on the throne of David, yet that child could find his sure resource in the God of his fathers: so that in this case, as in all others, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The very fact of Josiah's youth and

inexperience only afforded an occasion for the display of divine grace, and the setting forth of the value and the power of the Word of God.

This pious child was placed in a position of peculiar difficulty and temptation. He was surrounded by errors in various forms and of long standing; but "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images."

This was a good beginning. It is a great matter, while the heart is yet tender, to have it impressed with the fear of the Lord. It preserves it from a host of evils and errors. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and it taught this pious youth to know what was "right," and to adhere to it with unswerving fixedness of purpose. There is great force and value in the expression, "He did that which was right *in the sight of the Lord*." It was not that which was right in his own eyes, nor yet in the eyes of the people, nor in the eyes of those that had gone before him; but simply what was right in the sight of the Lord. This is the solid foundation of all right action. Until the fear of the Lord gets its true place in the heart, there can be nothing right, nothing wise, nothing holy. How can there be, if indeed that fear is the *beginning* of wisdom? We may do many things through the fear of man, many things through force of habit, through surrounding influences; but never can we do what is really right in the sight of the Lord until our hearts are brought to understand the fear of His holy name. This is the grand regulating principle. It imparts seriousness, earnestness, and reality — rare and admirable qualities! It is an effectual safeguard against levity and vanity. A man, or a child, who habitually walks in the fear of God is always earnest and sincere, always free from trifling and affectation, from assumption and bombast, life has a purpose, the heart has an object, and this gives intensity to the whole course and character.

But further, we read of Josiah that "he walked in the ways of David his father, *and declined neither to the right hand nor to the*

left. "What a testimony for the Holy Ghost to bear concerning a young man! How we do long for this plain decision! It is invaluable at all times, but especially in a day of laxity and latitudinarianism — of wise liberality and spurious charity like the present. It imparts great peace of mind. A vacillating man is never peaceful; he is always tossed to and fro. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He tries to please everybody, and in the end pleases nobody. The decided man, on the contrary, is he who feels he has "to please but *One*." This gives unity and fixedness to the life and character. It is an immense relief to be thoroughly done with men-pleasing and eye-service — to be able to fix the eye upon the Master alone, and go on with Him through evil report and through good report. True, we may be misunderstood and misrepresented; but that is a very small matter indeed; our great business is to walk in the divinely appointed path, "declining neither to the right hand nor to the left." We are convinced that plain decision is the only thing for the servant of Christ at the present moment; for so surely as the devil finds us wavering, he will bring every engine into play in order to drive us completely off the plain and narrow path. May God's Spirit work more mightily in our souls, and give us increased ability to say, "My heart is fixed, O God; my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."

We shall now proceed to consider the great work which Josiah was raised up to accomplish; but ere doing so, we must ask the reader to notice particularly the words already referred to, namely, "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, *he began to seek after the God of David his father.*" Here, we may rest assured, lay the true basis of all Josiah's valuable service. He began by seeking after God. Let young Christians ponder this deeply. Hundreds, we fear, have made shipwreck by rushing prematurely into work. They have become occupied and engrossed with their service before the heart was rightly established in the fear and love of God. This is a very serious error indeed, and we have met numbers, within the last few years, who have fallen into it. We should ever remember that those whom God uses much in public He trains in secret; and further, that all His most honoured servants have been more occupied with their Master than with their work. It is not that we undervalue work; by no means; but we do find that all those

who have been signally owned of God, and who have pursued a long and steady course of service and Christian testimony, have begun with much deep and earnest heart-work, in the secret of the divine presence. And on the other hand, we have noticed that when men have rushed prematurely into public work — when they began to teach before they had begun to learn, they have speedily broken down and gone back.

It is well to remember this. God's plants are deeply rooted, and often slow of growth. Josiah "began to seek God" four years before he began his public work. There was in his case a firm ground-work of genuine personal piety, on which to erect the superstructure of active service. This was most needful. He had a great work to do. "High places and groves, carved images and molten images," abounded on all hands, and called for no ordinary faithfulness and decision. Where were these to be had? In the divine treasury, and there alone. Josiah was but a child, and many of those who had introduced the false worship were men of years and experience. But he set himself to seek the Lord. He found his resource in the God of his father David. He betook himself to the fountain-head of all wisdom and power, and there gathered up strength wherewith to gird himself for what lay before him.

This, we repeat, was most needful; it was absolutely indispensable. The accumulated rubbish of ages and generations lay before him, One after another of his predecessors had added to the pile; and notwithstanding the reformation effected in the days of Hezekiah, it would seem as though all had to be done over again. Harken to the following appalling catalogue of evils and errors: "In the twelfth year, Josiah began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they break down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images that were on high above them he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and *made dust of them*, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And

when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into *powder*, and cut down all the idols throughout *all the land of Israel*, he returned to Jerusalem."

See also the narrative given in 2 Kings 23, where we have a much more detailed list of the abominations with which this devoted servant of God had to grapple. We do not quote any further. Enough has been given to show the fearful lengths to which even the people of God may go when once they turn aside, in the smallest measure, from the authority of Holy Scripture. We feel that this is one special lesson to be learned from the deeply interesting history of this best of Judah's kings, and we fondly trust it may be learned effectually. It is indeed a grand and all-important lesson. The moment a man departs, the breadth of a hair, from Scripture, there is no accounting for the monstrous extravagance into which he may rush. We may feel disposed to marvel how such a man as Solomon could ever be led to "build high places for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon." But then we can easily see how that having in the first place disobeyed the Word of his Lord in going to those nations for wives, he easily enough fell into the deeper error of adopting their worship.

But, Christian reader, let us remember that all the mischief, all the corruption and confusion, all the shame and dishonour, all the reproach and blasphemy, had its origin in the neglect of the Word of God. We cannot possibly ponder this fact too deeply. It is solemn, impressive, and admonitory beyond expression. It has ever been a special design of Satan to lead God's people away from Scripture. He will use anything and everything for this end — tradition, the church so-called, expediency, human reason, popular opinion, reputation and influence, character, position, and usefulness — all those he will use in order to get the heart and conscience away from that one golden sentence — that divine, eternal motto, "IT IS WRITTEN." All that enormous pile of error which our devoted young monarch was enabled to "grind into *dust*, and beat into *powder*" — all, all had its origin in the gross neglect of this most precious sentence. It mattered little to Josiah that all these things could boast of antiquity, and the authority of the fathers of the

Jewish nation. Neither was he moved by the thought that these altars and high places, these groves and images, might be regarded as proofs of largeness of heart, breadth of mind, and a liberality of spirit that spurned all narrowness, bigotry, and intolerance — that *would* not be confined within the narrow bounds of Jewish prejudice, but could travel forth through the wide, wide world, and embrace all in a circle of charity and brotherhood. None of these things, we are persuaded, moved him. If they were not based upon "Thus saith the Lord," he had but one thing to do with them, and that was to "*beat them into powder.*"

Part 3

The various periods in the life of Josiah are very strongly marked. "In the *eighth* year of his reign, he began to seek after the God of David his father"; "in the *twelfth* year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem"; and "in the *eighteenth* year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God."

Now in all this we can mark that progress which ever results from a real purpose of heart to serve the Lord. "The path of the just is as a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Such was the path of Josiah; and such, too, may be the path of the reader, if only he is influenced by the same earnest purpose. It does not matter what the circumstances may be. We may be surrounded by the most hostile influences, as Josiah was in his day; but a devoted heart, an earnest spirit, a fixed purpose, will, through grace, lift us above all, and enable us to press forward from stage to stage of the path of true discipleship.

If we study the first twelve chapters of the book of Jeremiah, we shall be able to form some idea of the condition of things in the days of Josiah. There we meet with such passages as the following: "I will utter My judgments against them touching *all their wickedness*, who have forsaken Me, and have *burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands*. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: *be not dismayed at their faces*, lest I confound thee

before them." "Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." So also in the opening of Jeremiah 3, we find the most terrible imagery used to set forth the base conduct of "backsliding Israel and treacherous Judah." Harken to the following glowing language in Jeremiah 4: "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thy heart. My bowels! my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet? For My people are foolish, they have not known Me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by His fierce anger."

What vivid language! The whole scene seems, in the vision of the prophet, reduced to *primaeval* chaos and darkness. In short, nothing could be more gloomy than the aspect here presented. The whole of these opening chapters should be carefully studied, if we would form a correct judgement of the times in which Josiah's lot was cast. They were evidently times characterised by deep seated and wide-spread corruptions, in every shape and form. High and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, prophets, priests, and people — all presented an appalling picture of hollowness, deceit, and heartless wickedness, which could only be faithfully portrayed by an inspired pen.

But why dwell upon this? Why multiply quotations in proof of the low moral condition of Israel and Judah in the days of king Josiah? Mainly to show that, no matter what may be our surroundings, we can individually serve the Lord, if only there be the purpose of heart to do so. Indeed, it is in the very darkest times that the light of true devotedness shines forth most brightly. It is thrown into relief by the surrounding gloom. The very circumstances which indolence and unfaithfulness would use as a plea for yielding to the current will only furnish a devoted spirit with a plea for making head against it. If Josiah had looked around him, what would he have seen? treachery, deceit, corruption, and violence. Such was the state of public morals. And what of religion? Errors and evils in every imaginable shape. Some of these were hoary with age. They had been instituted by *Solomon* and left standing by *Hezekiah*. Their foundations had been laid amid the splendours of the reign of Israel's wisest and wealthiest monarch, and the most pious and devoted of Josiah's predecessors had left them as they found them.

Who, then, was Josiah, that he should presume to overturn such venerable institutions? What right had he, a mere youth, raw and inexperienced, to set himself in opposition to men so far beyond him in wisdom, intelligence, and mature judgement? Why not leave things as he found them? Why not allow the current to flow peacefully on through those channels which had conducted it for ages and generations? Disruptions are hazardous. There is always great risk in disturbing old prejudices.

These and a thousand kindred questions might doubtless have exercised the heart of Josiah; but the answer was simple, direct, clear and conclusive. It was not the judgement of Josiah against the judgement of his predecessors, but it was the judgement of God against all. This is a most weighty principle for every child of God and every servant of Christ. Without it, we can never make head against the tide of evil which is flowing around us. It was this principle which sustained Luther in the terrible conflict which he had to wage with the whole of Christendom. He too, like Josiah, had to lay the axe to the root of old prejudices, and shake the very foundation of opinions and doctrines which had held almost

universal sway in the Church for over a thousand years. How was this to be done? Was it by setting up the judgement of Martin Luther against the judgement of popes and cardinals, councils and colleges, bishops and doctors? Assuredly not. This would never have brought about the Reformation. It was not Luther *versus* Christendom, but Holy Scripture versus Error.

Reader, ponder this! We feel it is a grand and all important lesson for this moment, as it surely was for the days of Luther and for the days of Josiah. we long to see the supremacy of Holy Scripture — the paramount authority of the Word of God — the absolute sovereignty of divine revelation reverently owned throughout the length and breadth of the Church of God. We are convinced that the enemy is diligently seeking, in all quarters and by all means, to undermine the authority of the Word, and to weaken its hold upon the human conscience. And it is because we feel this that we seek to raise, again and again, a note of solemn warning, as also to set forth, according to our ability, the vital importance of submitting, in all things, to the inspired testimony — the voice of God in Scripture. It is not sufficient to render a merely formal assent to that popular statement, "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants." We want more than this We want to be, in all things, absolutely governed by the authority of Scripture — not by our fellow-mortal's interpretation of Scripture, but by Scripture itself. We want to have the conscience in a condition to yield, at all times, a true response to the teachings of the divine Word.

This is what we have so vividly illustrated in the life and times of Josiah, and particularly in the transactions of the eighteenth year of his reign, to which we shall now call the reader's attention. This year was one of the most memorable, not only in the history of Josiah, but in the annals of Israel. It was signalised by two great facts, namely, *the discovery of the book of the law and the celebration of the feast of the Passover*. Stupendous facts! — facts which have left their impress upon this most interesting period, and rendered it pre-eminently fruitful in instruction to the people of God in all ages.

It is worthy of note that the discovery of the book of the law was made during the progress of Josiah's reformatory measures. It

affords one of the ten thousand proofs of that great practical principle that "to him that hath shall more be given"; and again, "If any man will *do* His will, he *shall know* of the doctrine."

"Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God. And when they came to Hilkiah the priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God.... And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. And Hilkiah the priest answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan carried the book to the king.... And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes" (2 Chr. 34:8-19).

Here we have a tender conscience bowing under the action of the Word of God. This was one special charm in the character of Josiah. He was, in truth, a man of a humble and contrite spirit, who trembled at the Word of God. Would that we all knew more of this! It is a most valuable feature of the Christian character. We certainly do need to feel much more deeply the weight, authority, and seriousness of Scripture. Josiah had no question whatever in his mind as to the genuineness and authenticity of the words which Shaphan had read in his hearing. We do not read of his asking, "How am I to know that this is the Word of God?" No; he trembled at it; he bowed before it; he was smitten down under it; he rent his garments. He did not presume to sit in judgement upon the Word of God, but, as was meet and right, he allowed the Word to judge him.

Thus it should ever be. If man is to judge Scripture, then Scripture is not the Word of God at all; but if Scripture is in very truth the Word of God, then it must judge man. And so it is and so it does. Scripture is the Word of God, and it judges man thoroughly. It lays bare the very roots of his nature — it opens up the foundations of his moral being. It holds up before him the only faithful mirror in which he can see himself perfectly reflected. This is the reason why

man does not like Scripture — cannot bear it — seeks to set it aside — delights to pick holes in it — dares to sit in judgement upon it. It is not so in reference to Other books. Men do not trouble themselves so much to discover and point out Flaws and Discrepancies in Homer or Herodotus, Aristotle or Shakespeare. No; but Scripture judges them — judges their ways, their lusts. hence the enmity of the natural mind to that most precious and marvellous Book, which, as we have already remarked, carries its own credentials with it to every divinely prepared heart. There is a power in Scripture which must bear down all before it. All must bow down under it, sooner or later. "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His Sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4: 12-13).

Josiah found it to be even so. The Word of God pierced him through and through. "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiyah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the kings, saying, Go inquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book." What a striking contrast between Josiah, with contrite heart, exercised conscience, and rent garments, bowing down under the mighty action of the Word of God, and our modern sceptics and infidels, who, with appalling audacity, dare to sit in judgement upon that very same Word. Oh that men would be wise in time, and bow their hearts and consciences in reverent submission to the Word of the living God before that great and terrible day of the Lord in the which they shall be compelled to bow, amid "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

God's Word shall stand forever, and it is utterly vain for man to set himself up in opposition to it, or seek by his reasonings and

sceptical speculations to find out errors and contradictions in it. "Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." "The word of the Lord endureth forever." Of what possible use is it, therefore, for man to resist the Word of God? He can gain nothing; but oh! what may he lose? If man could prove the Bible false, what should he gain? but if it be true after all, what does he lose? A serious inquiry! May it have its weight with any reader whose mind is at all under the influence of rationalistic or infidel notions.

We shall now proceed with our history.

"And Hilkiah and they that the king had appointed went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem, in the college;) and they spake to her to that effect." At the opening of this paper we referred to the fact of a child of eight years old being on the throne of David as indicative of the condition of things amongst the people of God. Here, too, we are arrested by the fact that the prophetic office was filled by a woman. It surely tells a tale. Things were low; but the grace of God was unfailing and abundant, and Josiah was so thoroughly broken down that he was prepared to receive the communication of the mind of God through whatever channel it might reach him. This was morally lovely. It might, to nature's view, seem very humiliating for a king of Judah to have recourse to a woman for counsel; but then that woman was the depository of the mind of God, and this was quite enough for a humble and a contrite spirit like Josiah's. He had thus far proved that his one grand desire was to know and do the will of God, and hence it mattered not by what vehicle the voice of God was conveyed to his ear, he was prepared to hear and obey.

Christian reader, let us consider this. We may rest assured that herein lies the true secret of divine guidance. "The meek will He guide in judgement, and the meek will He teach His way" (Ps. 25: 9). Were there more of this blessed spirit of meekness among us, there would be less confusion, less controversy, less striving about words to no profit. If we were all meek, we should all be divinely guided and divinely taught, and thus we should see eye to eye; we

should be of one mind, and speak the same thing, and avoid much sad and humbling division and heart-burning.

See what a full answer the meek and contrite Josiah received from Huldah the prophetess — an answer both as to his people and as to himself. "And she answered them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah. Because *they have forsaken Me*, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched."

All this was but the solemn reiteration and establishment of what had already fallen upon the open and attentive ear of the king of Judah; but then it came with fresh force, emphasis, and interest, as a direct personal communication to himself. It came enforced and enhanced by that earnest sentence, "Tell ye *the man* that sent you to me."

But there was more than this. There was a gracious message directly concerning Josiah himself. "And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard: *Because thy heart was tender*, and thou didst *humble thyself before God* when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and *humbledst thyself before Me*, and didst rend thy clothes and *weep before Me*; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again" (2 Chr. 34: 23-28).

All this is full of instruction and encouragement for us in this dark and evil day. It teaches us the immense value, in the divine estimation, of deep personal exercise of soul and contrition of heart. Josiah might have deemed the case hopeless — that nothing could avert the mighty tide of wrath and judgement which was about to

roll over the city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel — that any movement of his must prove utterly unavailing — that the divine purpose was settled — the decree gone forth, and that, in short, he had only to stand by and let things take their course. But Josiah did not reason thus. No; he bowed before the divine testimony. He humbled himself, rent his clothes, and wept. God took knowledge of this. Josiah's penitential tears were precious to Jehovah, and though the appalling judgement had to take its course, yet the penitent escaped. And not only did he himself escape, but he became the honoured instrument in the Lord's hand of delivering others also. He did not abandon himself to the influence of a pernicious fatalism, but in brokenness of spirit and earnestness of heart he cast himself upon God, confessing his own sins and the sins of his people. And then, when assured of his own personal deliverance, he set himself to seek the deliverance of his brethren also. This is a fine moral lesson for the heart. May we learn it thoroughly.

Part 4

It is deeply interesting and instructive to mark the actings of Josiah when his heart and conscience had been brought under the powerful influence of the Word of God. He not only bowed down under that Word himself, but he sought to lead others to bow likewise. This must ever be the case where the work is real. It is impossible for a man to feel the weight and solemnity of truth and not seek to bring others under its action. No doubt a quantity of truth may be held in the intellect — held superficially — held in a merely speculative, notional way; but this will have no practical effect; it does not tell upon the heart and conscience after a divine, living fashion; it does not affect the life and character. And inasmuch as it does not affect our own souls, neither will our mode of presenting it be very likely to act with much power upon others. True, God is sovereign, and He may use His own Word even when spoken by one who has never really felt its influence; but we are speaking now of what may properly and naturally be looked for; and we may rest assured that the best way in which to make others feel deeply is to feel deeply ourselves.

Take any truth you please. Take, for example, the glorious truth of the Lord's coming. How is a man most likely to affect his

hearers by the presentation of this truth? Unquestionably by being deeply affected himself. If the heart be under the power of that solemn word, "the Lord is at hand" — if this fact be realized in all its solemnity as to the world, and in its sweet attractiveness as to the believer individually and the Church collectively, then it will assuredly be presented in a way calculated to move the hearts of the hearers. It is easy to see when a man *feels* what he is saying. There may be a very clear and clever exposition of the doctrine of the second advent, and of all the collateral truths; but if it be cold and heartless, it will fall powerless on the ears of the audience. In order to speak to *hearts*, on any subject, the heart of the speaker must feel it. What was it that gave such power to Whitefield's discourses? It was not the depth or the range of truth contained in them, as is manifest to any intelligent reader. No. The secret of their mighty efficacy lay in the fact that the speaker *felt* what he was saying. Whitefield wept over the people, and no marvel if the people wept under Whitefield. He must be a hardened wretch indeed who can sit unmoved under a preacher who is shedding tears for his soul's salvation.

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not mean to say that anything in a preacher's manner can of itself convert a soul. Tears cannot quicken earnestness cannot regenerate. It is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." It is only by the powerful action of the Word and Spirit of God that any soul can be born again. All this we fully believe, and would ever bear in mind but at the same time, we as fully believe and would also bear in mind that God blesses earnest preaching and souls are moved by it. We have far too much mechanical preaching — too much routine work — too much of what may justly be called *going through a service*. We want more earnestness, more depth of feeling, more intensity, more power to weep over the souls of men, a more influential and abiding sense of the awful doom of impenitent sinners, the value of an immortal soul, and the solemn realities of the eternal world. We are told that the famous Garrick was once asked by a bishop how it was that he produced far more powerful results by his fiction than the bishop could by preaching truth. The reply of the actor is full of force. "My lord," said he, "the reason is

obvious: I speak fiction as though it were truth, whereas you speak truth as though it were fiction."

Alas! it is much to be feared that too many of us speak truth in the same way, and hence the little result. We are persuaded that earnest, faithful preaching is one of the special wants of this our day. There are a few here and there, thank God, who seem to *feel* what they are at — who stand before their audience as those who consider themselves as channels of communication between God and their fellows — men who are really bent on their work — bent, not merely on preaching and teaching, but on saving and blessing souls. The grand business of the evangelist is to *bring* the soul and Christ together; the business of the teacher and pastor is to *keep* them together. True it is, most blessedly true, that God is glorified and Jesus Christ magnified by the unfolding of truth, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear; but is this fact to be allowed to interfere, in the smallest degree, with the ardent desire for *results* in reference to souls? We do not for a moment believe it. The preacher should look for results, and should not be satisfied without them. He should no more think of being satisfied to go on without results than the husbandman thinks of going on from year to year without a crop. Some preachers there are who only succeed in preaching their hearers away, and then they content themselves by saying, "We are a sweet savour to God." Now, we believe this is a great mistake, and a fatal delusion. What we want is to live before God for the results of our work — to wait upon Him — to agonise in prayer for souls — to throw all our energies into the work — to preach as though the whole thing depended upon us, although knowing full well that we can do just nothing, and that our words must prove as the morning cloud if not fastened as a nail in a sure place by the Master of assemblies. We are convinced that, in the divine order of things, the earnest workman must have the fruit of his labour; and that according to his faith, so shall it be. There may be exceptions, but as a general rule, we may rest assured that a faithful preacher, will, sooner or later, reap fruit.

We have been drawn into the foregoing line of thought while contemplating the interesting scene in the life of Josiah presented to us at the close of 2 Chronicles 34. It will be profitable for us to

dwell upon it. Josiah was a man thoroughly in earnest. He felt the power of truth in his own soul, and he could not rest satisfied until he gathered the people around him, in order that the light which had shone upon him might shine upon them likewise. He did not, he could not, rest in the fact that he was to be gathered to his grave in peace — that his eyes were not to see the evil that was coming upon Jerusalem — that he was to escape the appalling tide of judgement which was about to roll over the land. No, he thought of others, he felt for the people around him; and inasmuch as his own personal escape stood connected with and based upon his true penitence and humiliation under the mighty hand of God, so he would seek, by the action of that Word which had wrought so powerfully in his own heart, to lead others to like penitence and humiliation.

"Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and his statutes *with all his heart and with all his soul*, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. And all his days they departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers."

There is a fine moral lesson in all this for us — yea, many lessons to which we, with all our light, knowledge, and privilege, may well sit down. What first of all strikes us at this moment is the fact that Josiah felt his responsibility to those around him. He did not put his light under a bushel, but rather allowed it to shine for the full benefit and blessing of others. This is all the more striking, inasmuch as that great practical truth of the unity of all believers in

one body was not known to Josiah, because not revealed by God. The doctrine contained in that one brief sentence, "There is one body and one Spirit," was not made known until long after the times of Josiah, even when Christ the risen Head had taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

But although this truth was "hid in God," nevertheless there was the unity of the nation of Israel. There was a national unity, though there was not the unity of a body; and this unity was always recognized by the faithful, whatever might be the outward condition of the people. The twelve loaves on the table of show-bread in the sanctuary were the divine type of the perfect unity and yet the perfect distinctness of the twelve tribes. The reader can see this in Leviticus 24. It is full of interest, and should be deeply pondered by every student of Scripture and every earnest lover of the ways of God. During the dark and silent watches of the night, the seven lamps of the golden candlestick threw their light upon the twelve loaves ranged by the hand of the high-priest according to the commandment of God upon the pure table. Significant figure!

It was on this grand truth that Elijah the Tishbite took his stand, when on Mount Carmel he built an altar "with twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be thy name" (1 Kings 18). To this same truth Hezekiah had regard when he commanded "that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for *all Israel*" (2 Chr. 29: 24). Paul, in his day referred to this precious truth, when in the presence of king Agrippa he spoke of "our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night" (Acts 26: 7).

Now, if any one of those men of faith had been asked, "Where are the twelve tribes?" could he have given an answer? could he have pointed them out? Assuredly he could; but not to sight — not to man's view, for the nation was divided — its unity was broken. In the days of Elijah and Hezekiah there were the ten tribes and the two; and in the days of Paul, the ten tribes were scattered abroad, and only a remnant of the two in the land of Palestine, under the dominion of Daniel's fourth beast. What then? Was the truth of God made of none effect by Israel's outward condition? Far be the

thought! "Our twelve tribes" must never be given up. The unity of the nation is a grand reality to faith. It is as true at this moment as when Joshua pitched the twelve stones at Gilgal. The Word of our God shall stand forever. Not one jot or tittle of aught that He has spoken shall ever pass away.

Change and decay may mark the history of human affairs, death and desolation may sweep like a withering blast over earth's fairest scenes, but Jehovah will make good His every word, and Israel's twelve tribes shall yet enjoy the promised land, in all its length, breadth and fullness. No power of earth or hell shall be able to hinder this blessed consummation. And why? What makes us so sure? How can we speak with such absolute certainty? Simply because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. We may be more sure that Israel's tribes shall yet enjoy their fair inheritance in Palestine than that the house Of Tudor once held sway in England. The former we believe on the testimony of God, who cannot lie; the latter on the testimony of erring man.

It is of the utmost importance that the reader should be clear as to this, not only because of its special bearing upon Israel and the land of Canaan, but also because it affects the integrity of Scripture as a whole. There is a loose mode of handling the Word of God, which is at once dishonouring to Him and injurious to us. Passages which apply distinctly and exclusively to Jerusalem and to Israel are made to apply to the spread of the gospel and the extension of the Christian Church. This, to say the least of it, is taking a very unwarrantable liberty with divine revelation. Our God can surely say what He means, and as surely He means what He says; hence, when He speaks of Israel and Jerusalem, He does not mean the Church; and when He speaks of the Church, He does not mean Israel or Jerusalem.

Expositors and students of Scripture should ponder this. Let no one suppose that it is merely a question of prophetic interpretation. It is far more than this. It is a question of the integrity, value, and power of the Word of God. If we allow ourselves to be loose and careless in reference to one class of Scriptures, we are likely to be loose and careless as to another, and then our sense of the weight and authority of all Scripture will be sadly enfeebled.

But we must return to Josiah, and see how he recognized, according to his measure, the great principle on which we have been dwelling. He certainly proved no exception to the general rule, namely, that all the pious kings of Judah had regard to the *unity* of the nation of Israel, and never suffered their thoughts, their sympathies, or their operations to be confined within any narrower range than "our twelve tribes." The twelve loaves on the pure table were ever before the eye of God and ever before the eye of faith. Nor was this a mere speculation — a non-practical dogma — a dead letter. No; it was in every case a great practical, influential truth. "Josiah took away *all* the abominations out of *all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel*." This was acting in the fullest harmony with his pious predecessor, Hezekiah, who commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin offering should be made for *all Israel*.

And now, Christian reader, mark the application of all this to your own souls at this present moment. Do you heartily believe, upon divine authority, in the doctrine of the unity of the body of Christ? Do you believe that there is such a body on this earth now, united to its divine and living Head in Heaven by the Holy Ghost? Do you hold this great truth from God Himself, upon the authority of Holy Scripture? Do you, in one word, hold as a cardinal and fundamental truth of the New Testament the indissoluble unity of the Church of God? Do not turn round and ask, "Where is this to be seen?" This is the question which unbelief must ever put, as the eye rests upon Christendom's numberless sects and parties, and to which faith replies, as the eye rests upon that imperishable sentence, "There is one body and one Spirit." Mark the words! — "There *is*" It does not say there *was* at one time and there shall be again "one body." Neither does it say that such a thing exists in Heaven. No; but it says, "There is one body and one Spirit" now on this earth. Can this truth be touched by the condition of things in the professing Church? Has God's Word ceased to be true because man has ceased to be faithful? Will any one undertake to say that the unity of the body was only a truth for apostolic times, and that it has no application now, seeing that there is no exhibition of it?

Reader, we solemnly warn you to beware how you admit into your heart a sentiment so entirely infidel as this. Rest assured it is the fruit of positive unbelief in God's Word. No doubt, appearances argue against this truth; but what truth is it against which appearances do not argue? And say, is it on appearances that faith ever builds? Did Elijah build on appearances when he erected his altar of twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob? Did king Hezekiah build on appearances when he issued that fine commandment that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel? Did Josiah build on appearances when he carried his reformatory operations into all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel? Surely not. They built upon the faithful Word of the God of Israel. That Word was true whether Israel's tribes were scattered or united. If God's truth is to be affected by outward appearances, or by the actings of men, then where are we? or what are we to believe? The fact is, there is hardly a truth in the entire compass of divine revelation to which we could with calm confidence commit our souls if we suffer ourselves to be affected by outward appearances.

No; reader, the only ground on which we can believe anything is this one eternal clause, "It is written"! Do you not admit this? Does not your whole soul bow down to it? Do you not hold it to be a principle entirely vital? We believe you do, as a Christian, hold, admit, and reverently believe this. Well, then, it is written, "There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph. 4). This is as clearly revealed in Scripture as that "we are justified by faith," or any other truth. Do outward appearances affect the saving, fundamental doctrine of justification by faith? Are we to call in question this precious truth because there is so little exhibition of its purifying power in the lives of believers? Who could admit such a fatal principle as this? What a complete upturning of all the foundations of our faith is necessarily involved in the admission of this most mischievous line of reasoning! We believe because it is written in the Word, not because it is exhibited in the world. Doubtless it ought to be exhibited, and it is our sin and shame that it is not. To this we shall afterward refer more fully; but we must insist upon the proper ground of belief, namely, divine revelation; and when this is clearly seen and fully

admitted, it applies as distinctly to the doctrine of the unity of the body as it does to the doctrine of justification by faith.

Part 5

We feel it to be of real moment to insist upon this principle, namely, that the only ground on which we can believe any doctrine is its being revealed in the divine Word. It is thus we believe all the great truths of Christianity. We know nothing and can believe nothing of what is spiritual, heavenly, or divine, save as we find it revealed in the Word of God. How do I know I am a sinner? Because Scripture hath declared that "all have sinned." No doubt I feel that I am a sinner; but I do not believe because I feel, but I feel because I believe, and I believe because God has spoken. Faith rests upon divine revelation, not on human feelings or human reasonings. "It is written" is quite sufficient for faith. It can do with nothing less, but it asks nothing more. God speaks: faith believes. Yes, it believes simply because God speaks. It does not judge God's Word by outward appearances, but it judges outward appearances by the Word of God.

Thus it is in reference to all the cardinal truths of the Christian religion, such as the Trinity, the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His atonement, His priesthood, His advent, the doctrine of original sin, of justification, judgement to come, eternal punishment. We believe these grand and solemn truths, not on the ground of feeling, of reason, or of outward appearances, but simply on the ground of divine revelation.

Hence, then, if it be asked, On what ground do we believe in the doctrine of the unity of the body? we reply, Upon the self-same ground that we believe the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the atonement. We believe it because it is revealed in sundry places in the New Testament. Thus, for example, in 1 Cor. 12 we read, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that *one body*, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into *one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Again, "God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to

that part which lacked that there should be no schism in the body.... Now, *ye are the body of Christ*, and members in particular."

Here we have distinctly laid down the perfect and indissoluble unity of the Church Of God, the body of Christ, on precisely the same authority as any other truth commonly received amongst us; so that there is just as much ground for calling in question the Deity of Christ as there is for calling in question the unity of the body. The one is as true as the other; and both are divinely revealed. We believe that Jesus Christ is God over all, blessed forever, because Scripture tells us so; we believe that there is one body because Scripture tells us so. We do not reason in the one case, but believe and bow; nor should we reason in the other case, but believe and bow. "There is one body and one Spirit."

Now, we must bear in mind that this truth of the unity of the body is not a mere abstraction — a barren speculation — a powerless dogma. It is a practical, formative, influential truth, in the light of which we are called to walk, to judge ourselves and all around us. It was so with the faithful in Israel of old. The unity of the nation was a real thing to them, and not a mere theory to be taken up or laid down at pleasure. It was a great formative, powerful truth. The nation was one in God's thoughts; and if it was not manifestly so, the faithful had only to take the place of self-judgement, brokenness of spirit, and contrition of heart. Witness the case of Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra. It never once occurred to these faithful men that they were to give up the truth of Israel's unity because Israel had failed to maintain it. They did not measure the truth of God by the actings of men; but they judged the actings of men, and themselves likewise, by the truth of God. This was the only true way to act. If the manifested unity of Israel was marred through man's sin and folly, the true hearted members of the congregation owned and mourned over the sin, confessed it as their own, and looked to God. Nor was this all. They felt their responsibility to act on the truth of God whatever might be the outward condition of things.

This, we repeat, was the meaning of Elijah's altar of twelve stones, erected in the face of Jezebel's eight hundred false prophets, and despite the division of the nation in man's view (1 Kings 18).

This, too, was the meaning of Hezekiah's letters sent to all Israel" to invite them to "come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel." Nothing can be more touching than the spirit and style of these letters. *"Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers and like your brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now, be ye not stiff necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary, which He hath sanctified forever; and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you"* (2 Chr. 30: 6-9).

What was all this but simple faith acting on the grand, eternal, immutable truth of the unity of the nation of Israel? The nation was one in the purpose of God, and Hezekiah looked at it from the divine standpoint, as faith ever does, and he acted accordingly. "So the posts passed from city to city, through the country of *Ephraim and Manasseh*, even unto Zebulun; but they *laughed them to scorn*, and mocked them." This was very sad, but it is only what we must expect. The actings of faith are sure to call forth the scorn and contempt of those who are not up to the standard of God's thoughts. Doubtless these men of Ephraim and Manasseh regarded Hezekiah's message as a piece of presumption or wild extravagance. Perhaps the great truth that was acting with such power on his soul, forming his character and ruling his conduct, was in their judgement a myth, or at best a valueless theory — a thing of the past — an institution of bygone ages, having no present application. But faith is never moved by the thoughts of men, and therefore Hezekiah went on with his work and God owned and blessed him. He could afford to be laughed at and turned into ridicule, while he beheld divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun humbling themselves and coming to Jerusalem. Hezekiah and all who thus humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God reaped a rich harvest of blessing, while the

mockers and scorers were left in the barrenness and deadness with which their own unbelief had surrounded them.

Mark the force of those words of Hezekiah, "If ye turn again unto the Lord, *your brethren and your children shall find compassion* before them that lead them captive." Does not this approach very near to that precious truth of the New Testament times, that we are members one of another, and that the conduct of one member affects all the rest? Unbelief might raise the question as to how this could possibly be — as to how the actings of one could possibly affect others far away; yet so it was in Israel, and so it is now in the Church of God.

Witness the case of Achan, in Joshua 7. There, one man sinned; and, so far as the narrative informs us, the whole congregation was ignorant of the fact; and yet we read that "*the children of Israel committed a trespass* in the accursed thing." And again, "*Israel hath sinned.*" How could this be? Simply because the nation was one, and God dwelt among them. This, plainly, was the ground of a double responsibility, namely, a responsibility to God, and a responsibility to the whole assembly and to each member in particular. It was utterly impossible for any one member of the congregation to shake off this high and holy responsibility. A person living at Dan might feel disposed to question how his conduct could affect a man living at Beersheba; yet such was the fact, and the ground of this fact lay in the eternal truth of Israel's indissoluble unity and Jehovah's dwelling in the midst of His redeemed assembly. (See Exodus 15: 2, and the many passages which speak of God's dwelling in the midst of Israel.)

We do not attempt even to quote the numerous Scriptures which speak of God's presence in the congregation of Israel — His dwelling in their midst. But we would call the attention of the reader to the all-important fact that those Scriptures *begin* with Exodus 15. It was when Israel stood, as a fully redeemed people, on Canaan's side of the Red Sea that they were able to say, "The Lord is my strength and my song, and He is become my salvation: He is *my God*, and I will prepare Him *an habitation.*" Redemption formed the ground of God's dwelling among His people, and His presence in their midst secured their perfect unity. Hence no one member of the

congregation could view himself as an isolated independent atom. Each one was called to view himself as part of a whole, and to view his conduct in reference to all those who, like himself, formed part of that whole.

Now, reason could never grasp a truth like this. It lay entirely beyond the ken of the most powerful human intellect. Faith alone could receive it and act upon it, and it is of the deepest interest to see that the faithful in Israel ever recognized it and acted upon it. Why did Hezekiah send letters to "all Israel"? Why did he expose himself to scorn and ridicule in so doing? Why did he command that "the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel"? Why did Josiah carry his reformatory operations into all "the countries that pertained to the children of Israel"? Because those men of God recognized the divine truth of Israel's unity, and they did not think of throwing this grand reality overboard because so few saw it or sought to carry it out. "The people shall dwell alone;" and "I, the Lord, will dwell among the children of Israel." These imperishable truths shine, like most precious gems of heavenly lustre, all along the page of Old Testament Scripture; and we invariably find that, just in proportion as any one was living near to God — near to the living and ever-gushing fountain of life and light and love — just in proportion as he entered into the thoughts, purposes, sympathies, and counsels of the God of Israel, did he apprehend and seek to carry out that which God had declared to be true of His people, though His people had proved so untrue to Him.

And now, Christian reader, we would ask you a very plain and pointed question, which is this: Do you not recognize in the unity of the Jewish nation the foreshadowing of a higher unity now existing in that one body of which Christ is the Head? We trust you do. We fondly hope that your whole moral being bows down with reverent submission, to the mighty truth, "There is one body." But then we can well imagine that you feel yourself not a little perplexed and confounded when you cast your eye around you through the length and breadth of the professing Church, in search of any positive expression of this unity. You see Christians scattered and divided — you see innumerable sects and parties; and what perhaps puzzles you most of all, you see those who profess to believe and act upon

the truth of the unity of the body divided amongst themselves, and presenting anything but a spectacle of unity and harmony. All this, we confess, is very perplexing to one who looks at it from a merely human standpoint. We are not the least surprised at people being stumbled and hindered by these things. Still the foundation of God standeth sure. His truth is perfectly indestructible; and if we gaze with admiration upon the faithful worthies of a bygone age who believed and confessed the unity of Israel when there was not a trace of that unity visible to mortal eyes, why should we not heartily believe and diligently carry out the higher unity of the one body? "There is one body and one Spirit," and herein lies the basis of our responsibility to one another and to God. Are we to surrender this all-important truth because Christians are scattered and divided? God forbid. It is as real and as precious as ever, and it ought to be as formative and as influential. We are bound to act upon the truth of God, irrespective of consequences, and utterly regardless of outward appearances. It is not for us to say, as so many do, "The case is hopeless: everything has gone to pieces. It is impossible to carry out the truth of God amid the heaps of rubbish which lie around us. The unity of the body was a thing of the *past*; it may be a thing of the *future*, but it cannot be a thing of the *present*. The idea of unity must be abandoned as thoroughly utopian, it cannot be maintained in the face of Christendom's numberless sects and parties. Nothing remains now but for each one to look to the Lord for himself, and to do the best he can, in his own *individual* sphere, and according to the dictates of his own conscience and judgement."

Such is, in substance, the language of hundreds of the true people of God; and as is their language, so is their practical career. But we must speak plainly, and we have no hesitation in saying that this language savours of sheer unbelief in that great cardinal verity of the unity of the body; and, moreover, that we have just as much warrant for rejecting the precious doctrine of Christ's deity, of His perfect humanity, or of His vicarious sacrifice, as we have for rejecting the truth of the perfect unity of His body, inasmuch as this latter rests upon precisely the same foundation as the former, namely, the eternal truth of God — the absolute statement of Holy Scripture. What right have we to set aside any one truth of divine revelation? What authority have we to single out any special truth

from the Word of God and say that it no longer applies? We are bound to receive all truth, and to submit our souls to its authority. It is a dangerous thing to admit for a moment the idea that any one truth of God is to be set aside, on the plea that it cannot be carried out. It is sufficient for us that it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures: we have only to *believe* and to *obey*. Does Scripture declare that there is "one body"? Assuredly it does. This is enough. We are responsible to maintain this truth, cost what it may; we can accept nothing else — nothing less — nothing different. We are bound, by the allegiance which we owe to Christ the Head, to testify, practically, against everything that militates against the truth of the indissoluble unity of the Church of God, and to seek earnestly and constantly a faithful expression of that unity.

True, we shall have to contend with false unity on the one hand and false individuality on the other; but we have only to hold fast and confess the truth of God, looking to Him, in humility of mind and earnest purpose of heart, and He will sustain us in the path, let the difficulties be what they may. No doubt there are difficulties in the way — grave difficulties, such as we in our own strength cannot cope with. The very fact that we are told to "*endeavour* to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is sufficient to prove that there are difficulties in the way; but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is amply sufficient for all the demands that may be made upon us in seeking to act upon this most precious truth.

In contemplating the present condition of the professing Church we may discern two very distinct classes. In the first place, there are those who are seeking unity on false grounds; and secondly, those who are seeking it on the ground laid down in the New Testament. This latter is distinctly a spiritual, living, divine unity, and stands out in vivid contrast with all the forms of unity which man has attempted, whether it be national, ecclesiastical, ceremonial, or doctrinal. The Church of God is not a nation, not an ecclesiastical or political system. It is a body united to its divine Head in Heaven, by the presence of the Holy Ghost. This is what it was, and this is what it is. "There is one body and one Spirit." This remains unalterably true. It holds good now just as much as when

the inspired apostle penned Ephesians 4. Hence anything that tends to interfere with or mar this truth must be wrong, and we are bound to stand apart from it and testify against it. To seek to unite Christians on any other ground than the unity of the body is manifestly opposed to the revealed mind of God. It may seem very attractive, very desirable, very reasonable, right, and expedient; but it is contrary to God, and this should be enough for us. God's Word speaks *only* of the unity of the body and the unity of the Spirit. It recognises no other unity: neither should we.

The Church of God is one, though consisting of many members. It is not local, or geographical; it is corporate. All the members have a double responsibility; they are responsible to the Head, and they are responsible to one another. It is utterly impossible to ignore this responsibility. Men may seek to shirk it; they may deny it; they may assert their individual rights, and act according to their own reason, judgement, or will; but they cannot get rid of the responsibility founded upon the fact of the one compact body. They have to do with the Head in Heaven and with the members on earth. They stand in this double relationship — they were incorporated therein by the Holy Ghost, and to deny It is to deny their very spiritual existence. It is founded in life, formed by the Spirit, and taught and maintained in the Holy Scriptures. There is no such thing as independency. Christians cannot view themselves as mere individuals — as isolated atoms. "We are members one of another." This is as true as that we are "justified by faith." No doubt there is a sense in which we are individual: we are individual in our repentance; individual in our faith; individual in our justification; individual in our walk with God and in our service to Christ; individual in our rewards for service, for each one shall get a white stone and a new name engraved thereon known only to himself. All this is quite true, but it in no wise touches the other grand practical truth of our union with the Head above and with each and all of the members below.

And we would here call attention to two very distinct lines of truth flowing out of two distinct titles of our blessed Lord, namely, Headship and Lordship. He is Head of His body the Church, and He is Lord of all, Lord of each. Now, when we think of Christ as Lord,

we are reminded of our individual responsibility to Him, in the wide range of service to which He, in His sovereignty, has graciously called us. Our reference must be to Him in all things. All our actings, all our movements, all our arrangements, must be placed under the commanding influence of that weighty sentence (often, alas! lightly spoken and penned), "*If the Lord will.*" And, moreover, no one has any right to thrust himself between the conscience of a servant and the commandment of his Lord. All this is divinely true, and of the very highest importance. The Lordship of Christ is a truth the value of which cannot possibly be over-estimated.

But we must bear in mind that Christ is *Head as well as Lord*; He is Head of a body, as well as Lord of individuals. These things must not be confounded. We are not to hold the truth of Christ's Lordship in such a way as to interfere with the truth of His Headship. If we merely think of Christ as Lord and ourselves as individuals responsible to Him, then we shall ignore His Headship, and lose sight of our responsibility to every member of that body of which He is Head. We must jealously watch against this. We cannot look at ourselves as isolated, independent atoms; if we think of Christ as Head, then we must think of all His members, and this opens up a wide range of practical truth. We have holy duties to discharge to our fellow-members, as well as to our Lord and Master; and we may rest assured that no one walking in communion with Christ can ever lose sight of the grand fact of his relationship to every member of His body. Such an one will ever remember that his walk and ways exert an influence upon Christians living at the other side of the globe. This is a wondrous mystery, but it is divinely true. "If one member suffer, *all* the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12: 26). You cannot reduce the body of Christ to a matter of locality: the body is one, and we are called to maintain this practically in every possible way, and to bear a decided testimony against everything which tends to hinder the expression of the perfect unity of the body, whether it be false unity or false individuality. The enemy is seeking to associate Christians on a false ground, and gather them around a false centre; or, if he cannot do this, he will send them adrift upon the wide and tumultuous ocean of a desultory individualism. *We are thoroughly persuaded, before God, that the only safeguard against*

both these false and dangerous extremes is divinely wrought faith in the grand foundation truth of the unity of the body of Christ.

Part 6

It may here be proper to inquire what is the suited attitude of the Christian in view of the grand foundation-truth of the unity of the body. That it is a truth distinctly laid down in the New Testament cannot possibly be questioned. If any reader of these pages be not fully established in the knowledge and hearty belief of this truth, let him prayerfully study 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, Ephesians 2 and 4, Colossians 2 and 3. He will find the doctrine referred to in a practical way in the opening of Romans 12; though it is not the design of the Holy Ghost in that magnificent Epistle to give us a full unfolding of the truth respecting the Church. What we have to look for there is rather the soul's relationship with God through the death and resurrection of Christ. We might pass through the first eleven chapters of Romans and not know that there is such a thing as the Church of God, the body of Christ; and when we reach Romans 12, the doctrine of the one body is assumed, but not dwelt upon.

There is, then, "one body" actually existing on this earth, formed by the "one Spirit," and united to the living Head in Heaven. This truth cannot be gainsaid. Some may not see it; some may find it very hard to receive it, in view of the present condition of things; but nevertheless it remains a divinely established truth that "there is one body," and the question is, how are we individually affected by this truth? It is as impossible to shake off the responsibility involved therein as it is to set aside the truth itself. If there is a body of which we are members, then do we, in every truth, stand in a holy relationship to every member of that body on earth, as well as to the Head in Heaven; and this relationship, like every other, has its characteristic affections, privileges, and responsibilities.

And be it remembered, we are not speaking now of the question of association with any special company of Christians, but of the whole body of Christ upon earth. No doubt each company of Christians, wherever assembled, should be but the local expression of the whole body. It should be so gathered and so ordered, on the authority of the Word, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, as that

all Christ's members who are walking in truth and holiness might happily find their place there. If an assembly be not thus gathered and thus ordered, it is not on the ground of the unity of the body at all. If there be anything, no matter what, in order, discipline, doctrine, or practice, which would prove a barrier to the presence of any of Christ's members whose faith and practice are according to the Word of God, then is the unity of the body practically denied. We are solemnly responsible to own the truth of the unity of the body. We should so meet that all the members of Christ's body might, simply as such, sit down with us and exercise whatever gift the Head of the Church has bestowed upon them. The body is one. Its members are scattered over the whole earth. Distance is nothing: locality nothing. It may be New Zealand, London, Paris, or Edinburgh: it matters not. A member of the body in one place is a member of the body everywhere for there is but "one body and one Spirit." It is the Spirit who forms the body, and links the members with the Head and with one another. Hence, a Christian coming from New Zealand to London ought to expect to find an assembly so gathered as to be a faithful expression of the unity of the body, to which he might attach himself; and furthermore, any such Christian ought to find his place in the bosom of that assembly, provided always there be nothing in doctrine or walk to forbid his hearty reception.

Such is the divine order, as laid down in 1 Cor. 12 and 14; Eph. 2 and 4, and assumed in Rom. 12. Indeed, we cannot study the New Testament and not see this blessed truth. We find in various cities and towns saints gathered by the Holy Ghost in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; as, for example, at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica. These were not independent, isolated, fragmentary assemblies, but parts of the one body, so that a member of the Church in one place was a member of the Church everywhere. Doubtless, each assembly, as guided by the one Spirit, and under the one Lord, acted in all local matters, such as receiving to communion, or putting away any wicked person from their midst; meeting the wants of their poor, and such like; but we may be quite assured that the act of the assembly at Corinth would be recognized by all other assemblies, so that if any one was separated from communion there, he would, if known, be refused in all other places;

otherwise it would be a plain denial of the unity of the body. We have no reason to suppose that the assembly at Corinth communicated or conferred with any other assembly previous to the putting away of "the wicked person" in 1 Corinthians 5, but we are bound to believe that that act would be duly recognized and sanctioned by every assembly upon the earth, and that any assembly knowingly receiving the excommunicated man would have cast a slur upon the assembly at Corinth, and practically denied the unity of the body.

This we believe to be the plain teaching of the New Testament Scriptures — this, the doctrine which any simple, true-hearted student of these Scriptures would gather up. That the Church has failed to carry out this precious truth is, alas! painfully true; and that we are all participators in this failure is equally true. The thought of this should humble us deeply before God. Not one can throw a stone at another, for we are all verily guilty in this matter. Let not the reader suppose for a single moment that our object in these pages is to set up anything like high ecclesiastical pretensions, or to afford countenance to hollow assumption, in the face of manifest sin and failure. God forbid! we say with our very heart of hearts. We believe that there is a most urgent call upon all God's people to humble themselves in the dust on account of our sad departure from the truth so plainly laid down in the Word of God.

Thus it was with the pious and devoted king Josiah, whose life and times have suggested this entire line of thought. He found the book of the law, and discovered in its sacred pages an order of things wholly different from what he saw around him. How did he act? Did he content himself by saying, "The case is hopeless: the nation is too far gone: ruin has set in, and it is utterly vain to think of aiming at the divine standard; we must only let things stand, and do the best we can"? Nay, reader, such was not Josiah's language or mode of action; but he humbled himself before God, and called upon others to do the same. And not only so, but he sought to carry out the truth of God. He aimed at the very loftiest standard, and the consequence was, that "from the days of Samuel the prophet, there was no Passover like to Josiah's kept in Israel; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover."

Such was the result of faithful reference and adherence to the Word of God, and thus it will ever be, for "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Look at the actings of the remnant that returned from Babylon the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. What did they do? They set up the altar of God; they built the temple, and repaired the walls of Jerusalem. In other words, they occupied themselves with the true worship of the God of Israel, and with the grand centre or gathering-point of His people. This was right. It is what faith always does, regardless of circumstances. If the remnant had looked at circumstances, they could not have acted. They were a poor contemptible handful of people, under the dominion of the uncircumcised Gentiles. They were surrounded by active enemies on all sides, who, instigated by the enemy of God, of His city, of His people, left nothing undone to hinder them in their blessed work. These enemies ridiculed them, and said, "What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" Nor was this all; not only had they to contend with powerful foes without, there was also internal weakness, for "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall" (Neh. 4). All this was very depressing. It was very different from the brilliant and palmy days of Solomon. His burden-bearers were many and strong, and there was no rubbish covering the great stones and costly with which he built the house of God, nor any contemptuous foe to sneer at his work. And yet, for all that, there were features attaching to the work of Ezra and Nehemiah which are not to be found in the days of Solomon. Their very feebleness, the piles of rubbish which lay before them, the proud and insulting enemies who surrounded them — all these things conspired to add a peculiar halo of glory to their work. They built and prospered, and God was glorified, and He declared in their ears these cheering words: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Hag. 2: 9).

It is of importance, in connection with the subject that has been engaging our attention, that the reader should carefully study the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah. They are

full of most blessed instruction, comfort, and encouragement in a day like the present. Many, nowadays, it may be, are disposed to smile at the bare mention of such a subject as the unity of the body; but let them ask themselves, Is it the smile of calm confidence, or the sneer or unbelief? One thing is certain, the devil as cordially hates the doctrine of the unity of the body as he hates any other doctrine of divine revelation, and he will as assuredly seek to hinder any attempt to carry it out as he sought to hinder the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah. But let us not be discouraged. It is enough for us that we find in God's Word the precious truth of the one body. Let us bring the light of this to bear upon the present condition of the professing Church, and see what it will reveal to our eyes. It will most assuredly put us on our faces in the dust before our God because of our ways; but at the same time, it will lift our hearts up to the contemplation of the divine standard. It will so enlighten and elevate our souls as to render us thoroughly dissatisfied with everything that does not present some expression, however feeble, of the unity of the body of Christ. It is wholly impossible that any one can drink into his soul the truth of the one body and rest satisfied with any thing short of the practical recognition thereof. True, he must make up his mind to bear the brunt of the enemy's opposition. He will meet a Sanballat here, and a Rehum there, but faith can say,

Is God for me? I fear not, though all against me rise;

When I call on Christ my Saviour the host of evil flies.

There is ample encouragement for our souls in the Word of God. If we look at Josiah, just *before the captivity*, what do we see? A man simply taking the Word as his guide — judging himself and all around by its light — rejecting all that was contrary to it, and seeking, with earnest purpose of heart, to carry out what he found written there. And what was the result? The most blessed Passover that had been celebrated since the days of Samuel.

Again, if we look at Daniel, *during the captivity*, what do we see? A man acting simply on the truth of God and praying toward Jerusalem, though death stared him in the face as the consequence of

his act. What was the result? A glorious testimony to the God of Israel, and the destruction of Daniel's enemies.

Finally, if we look at the remnant, *after the captivity*, what do we see? Men, in the face of appalling difficulties, rebuilding that city which was, and shall be, God's earthly centre. And what was the result? The joyous celebration of the feast of tabernacles, which had not been known since the days of Joshua the son of Nun.

Now, if we take any of the above interesting cases, and inquire as to the effect of their looking at surrounding circumstances, what answer shall we get? Take Daniel, for instance. Why did he open his window toward Jerusalem? Why look toward a city of ruins? Why call attention to a spot which only bore testimony to Israel's sin and shame? Would it not be better to let the name of Jerusalem sink into oblivion? Ah? we can guess at Daniel's reply to all such inquiries. Men might smile at him too, and deem him a visionary enthusiast; but he knew what he was doing. His heart was occupied with God's centre, the city of David, the grand gathering-point for Israel's twelve tribes. Was he to give up God's truth because of outward circumstances? Surely not. He could not consent to lower the standard even the breadth of a hair. He would weep, and pray, and fast, and chasten his soul before God, but never lower the standard. Was he going to give up God's thoughts about Zion because Israel had proved unfaithful? Not he. Daniel knew better than this. His eye was fixed on God's eternal truth, and hence, though he was in the dust because of his own sins and his people's, yet the divine banner floated above his head, in its unfading glory.

Just so now dear Christian reader, we are called to fix the gaze of faith upon the imperishable truth of the one body; and not only to gaze upon it, but seek to carry it out in our feeble measure. This should be our one definite and constant aim. We should ever and only seek the expression of the unity of the body. We are not to ask, "How can this be?" Faith never says, "How?" in the presence of divine revelation; it believes and acts. We are not to surrender the truth of God on the plea that we cannot carry it out. The truth is revealed, and we are called to bow to it. We are not called to form the unity of the body. Very many seem to think that this unity is a something which they themselves are to set up or form in some way

or another. This is a mistake. The unity exists. It is the result of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the body, and we have to recognize it, and walk in the light of it. This will give great definiteness to our course. It is always immensely important to have a distinct object before the heart, and to work with direct reference thereto. Look at Paul, that most devoted of workmen. What was his aim? — for what did he work? Hear the answer in his own words: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for *His body's sake, which is the Church*: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1: 24-29).

Now, this was a great deal more than the mere conversion of souls, precious as that is, most surely. Paul preached the gospel with a direct view to the body of Christ; and this is the pattern for all evangelists. We should not rest in the mere fact that souls are quickened; we should keep before our minds their incorporation, by the one Spirit, into the one body. This would effectually preserve us from sect-making — from preaching to swell the ranks of a party — from seeking to get persons to join this that or the other denomination. We should know nothing whatever but the one body, because we find nothing else in the New Testament. If this be lost sight of, the evangelist will not know what to do with souls when they are converted. A man may be used in the conversion of hundreds — a most precious work indeed — precious beyond all expression; and if he does not see the unity of the body, he must be at sea as to their further course. This is very serious, both as to himself and them, and also as to the testimony for Christ.

May God's Spirit lead all Christians to see this great truth in all its bearings. We have but glanced at it, in connection with our

theme; but it demands much serious attention at the present moment. It may be that some of our readers are disposed to find fault with what they may deem a long digression from the subject of "Life and Times of Josiah"; but in truth it should not be looked on as a digression, but as a line of truth flowing naturally out of that subject — a line, too, which cannot possibly be overestimated.

Part 7

In closing our remarks on "The Life and Times of Josiah," we shall in few words advert, first, to the fact of his celebration of the Passover; and secondly, to the solemn close of his history. Our sketch of this truly interesting period would unquestionably be incomplete were these things omitted.

And first, then, as to the fact — so full of interest and encouragement — that at the very close of Israel's history there should be one of the brightest moments that Israel had ever known. What does this teach us? It very manifestly teaches us that in darkest times it is the privilege of the faithful soul to act on divine principles and to enjoy divine privileges. We look upon this as a most weighty fact for all ages, but specially weighty at the present moment. If we did nothing more by writing our papers on Josiah than to impress this great fact on the mind of the Christian reader, we should consider that we had not written in vain. If Josiah had been influenced by the spirit and principle which, alas! seem to actuate so many in this our day, he never could have attempted to celebrate the Passover at all. He would have folded his arms and said, "It is useless to think of maintaining any longer our great national institutions. It can only be regarded as a piece of presumption to attempt the celebration of that ordinance which was designed to set forth Israel's deliverance from judgement by the blood of the lamb, when Israel's unity is broken, and its national glory faded and gone."

But Josiah did not reason like this; he simply acted upon the truth of God. He studied the Scriptures, and rejected what was wrong and did what was right. "Moreover, Josiah kept a Passover unto the Lord in Jerusalem; and they killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of *the first month*" (2 Chr. 35: 1). This was taking higher ground than Hezekiah had taken, inasmuch as he kept his

Passover "on the fourteenth day of *the second month*" (2 Chr. 30: 15). In so doing, Hezekiah was, as we know, availing himself of the provision which grace had made for cases of defilement (see Num. 9: 9-11). The divine order, however, had fixed "the first month" as the proper period, and to this order Josiah was enabled to conform. In short, he took the very highest ground, according to the truth of God, while lying low under the deep sense of personal and national failure. This is ever the way of faith.

"And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord, and said unto the Levites that taught *all Israel*, which were holy unto the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house which *Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel*, did build: it shall not be a burden on your shoulders; serve now the Lord your God, and *His people Israel*. And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, *according to the writing of David king of Israel*, and according to the writing of Solomon his son, and stand in the holy place, according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites. So kill the Passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may *do according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses*. "

Here we have Josiah taking the loftiest ground and acting on the highest authority. The most cursory reader cannot fail to be arrested, as he scans the lines just quoted from the inspired record, by the names of "Solomon," "David," "Moses," "all Israel," and above all, by the expression — so full of dignity, weight, and power — "That they may do according to the word of the Lord." Most memorable words! May they sink down into our ears and into our hearts. Josiah felt it to be his high and holy privilege to conform to the divine standard, notwithstanding all the errors and evils which had crept in from age to age. God's truth must stand forever. Faith owns and acts on this precious fact, and reaps accordingly. Nothing can be more lovely than the scene enacted on the occasion to which we are now referring. Josiah's strict adherence to the Word of the Lord is not more to be admired than his large-hearted devotedness and liberality. "He gave to the people of the flock, lambs and kids, all for the Passover-offerings, for all that were present, to the

number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bullocks: these were of the king's substance. And his princes gave willingly unto the people, to the priests, and to the Levites.... So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment.... And the singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the porters waited at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover, and to offer burnt-offerings upon the altar of the Lord, according to the commandment of king Josiah. And *the children of Israel* that were present kept the Passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. And there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this Passover kept."

What a picture! King, princes, priests, Levites, singers, porters, all Israel, Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem — all gathered together — all in their true place and at their appointed work, "according to the word of the Lord" — and all this "in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah," when the entire Jewish polity was on the very eve of dissolution. Surely this must speak to the heart of the thoughtful reader. It tells its own impressive tale, and teaches its own peculiar lesson. It tells us that no age, no circumstances, no influence, can ever change the truth of God or dim the vision of faith. "The word of the Lord endureth forever," and faith grasps that Word and holds it fast in the face of everything. It is the privilege of the believing soul to have to do with God and His eternal truth; and, moreover, it is the duty of such an one to aim at the very loftiest standard of action, and to be satisfied with nothing lower. Unbelief will draw a plea from the condition of things around to lower the standard, to relax the grasp, to slacken the pace, to lower the tone. Faith says "No!" — emphatically and decidedly, "No!" Let us bow our heads in shame and sorrow on account of our sin and failure, but keep the standard up. The failure

is ours: the standard is God's. Josiah wept and rent his clothes, but he did not surrender the truth of God. He felt and owned that he and his brethren and his fathers had sinned, but that was no reason why he should not celebrate the Passover according to the divine order. It was as imperative upon him to do right as it was upon Solomon, David, or Moses. It is our business to obey the Word of the Lord, and we shall assuredly be blessed in our deed. This is one grand lesson to be drawn from the life and times of Josiah, and it is undoubtedly a seasonable lesson for our own times. May we learn it thoroughly. May we learn to adhere with holy decision to the ground on which the truth of God has set us, and to occupy that ground with a larger measure of true devotedness to Christ and His cause.

Most gladly would we linger over the brilliant and soul-stirring scene presented in the opening verses of 2 Chronicles 35, but we must bring this paper to an end, and we shall merely glance very rapidly at the solemn and admonitory close of Josiah's history. It stands in sad and painful contrast with all the rest of his most interesting career, and sounds in our ears a note of warning to which we are bound to give our most serious attention. We shall do little more than quote the passage, and then leave the reader to reflect upon it, prayerfully and humbly, in the presence of God.

"*After all this*, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Charchemish by Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war; for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not. Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn his face from him, but *disguised himself*, that he might fight with him, and harkened not to the words of Necho *from the mouth of God* and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away, for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem: and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah" (2 Chr. 35: 20-25).

All this is very sad and humbling. We do not wish to dwell upon it further than is absolutely needful for the purpose of instruction and admonition. The Holy Spirit does not expatiate, but He has recorded it for our learning. It is ever His way to give us men as they were — to write the history of their "deeds, *first and last*" good and bad — one as well as another. He tells us of Josiah's piety at the "first," and of his wilfulness at the "last." He shows us that so long as Josiah walked in the light of divine revelation, his path was illuminated by the bright beams of the divine countenance; but the moment he attempted to act for himself — to walk by the light of his own eyes — to travel off the straight and narrow way of simple obedience, that moment dark and heavy clouds gathered around him, and the course that had opened in sunshine ended in gloom. Josiah went against Necho without any command from God — yea, he went in direct opposition to words spoken "from the mouth of God." He meddled with strife that belonged not to him and he reaped the consequences.

"He disguised himself." Why do this, if he was conscious of acting for God? Why wear a mask, if treading the divinely appointed pathway? Alas! Josiah failed in this, and in his failure he teaches us a salutary lesson. May we profit by it. May we learn more than ever to seek a divine warrant for all we do, and to do nothing without it. We can count on God to the fullest extent if we are walking in His way, but we have no security whatever if we attempt to travel off the divinely appointed line. Josiah had no command to fight at Megiddo, and hence he could not count on divine protection. "He disguised himself," but that did not shield him from the enemy's arrow. "The archers shot him" — they gave him his death wound, and he fell, amid the tears and lamentations of a people to whom he had endeared himself by a life of genuine piety and earnest devotedness.

May we have grace to imitate him in his piety and devotedness, and to guard against his wilfulness. It is a serious thing for a child of God to persist in doing his own will. Josiah went to Megiddo when he ought to have tarried at Jerusalem, and the archers shot him, and he died; Jonah went to Tarshish when he ought to have gone to Nineveh, and he was flung into the deep: Paul persisted

in going to Jerusalem though the Spirit told him not, and he fell into the hands of the Romans. Now, all these were true, earnest, devoted servants of God; but they failed in these things; and though God overruled their failure for blessing, yet they had to reap the fruit of their failure, for "*our* God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12: 29).

Esther 6

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT

“On that night could not the king sleep.” How was this? What was it that drove sleep from the monarch's eyes and slumber from his eyelids? Why could not the mighty Ahasuerus enjoy a mercy which was the portion of the very least of his subjects? Some may say, “The heavy cares of royalty robbed him of that which 'a laboring man' enjoys.” This might be so on other nights, but “on that night” we must account for his restlessness in quite another way. The finger of the Almighty was in that sleepless night. “The Lord God of the Hebrews” had a mighty work to accomplish on behalf of His beloved people and in order to bring that about, He drove “balmy sleep” from the luxurious couch of the monarch of 127 provinces.

This brings out in a marked way the character of the Book of Esther. The reader will observe that, throughout this interesting section of inspiration, the name of God is never heard. Yet His finger is visibly stamped upon everything. The most trivial circumstances displays His “wonderful counsel and excellent working.” Nature's vision cannot trace the movement of the wheels of Jehovah's chariot, but faith not only traces it, but knows the direction in which it moves. The enemy plots, but God is above him. Satan's every movement is seen to be but a link in the marvelous chain of events by which the God of Israel was bringing about His purpose of grace respecting His people. Thus it has been, thus it is and thus it shall ever be. Satan's malice, man's pride, the most hostile influences, are all but so many instruments in the hand of God for the accomplishment of His gracious purposes. This gives the sweetest rest to the heart amid the ceaseless tossings and fluctuations of human affairs. “The end of the Lord” shall assuredly be seen. “His counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure.” Blessed be His name for this soul-sustaining assurance! It quiets the heart at all times. Jehovah is behind the scenes. Every wheel, every screw, every pivot in the vast machine of human affairs is under His control. Though His name be not known or acknowledged by the

children of earth, His finger is seen, His word is trusted and His end expected by the children of faith.

How clearly is all this seen in the Book of Esther. Vashti's beauty, the king's pride therein, his unseemly command, her indignant refusal, the advice of the king's counselors, are all but the unfolding of Jehovah's ripening purposes. Of "all the fair young virgins gathered at Shushan the palace," not one must be allowed to win the king's heart except Esther, the daughter of an obscure Jewish house, a desolate orphan. Again, of all the officers, ministers and attendants about the palace, not one must be allowed to discover the conspiracy against the king's life except "a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai." And on that sleepless night, nothing must be brought to while away the monarch's weary hours except "the book of the records of the chronicles." Strange recreation for a sensuous king! But God was behind all this. There was a certain record in that book about "a certain Jew" which must be brought immediately under the eye of the restless monarch. Mordecai must come into notice. He must be rewarded for his fidelity, and so rewarded as to cover with overwhelming confusion the face of the proud Amalekite. At the very moment that this record was passing under review, none other than the haughty and wicked Haman must be seen in the court of the king's house. He had come to ensure the death of Mordecai, but is forced by the providence of God to plan for Mordecai's triumph and dignity. He had come to get him hanged on a gallows, but, he is made to clothe him with the king's robe, to set him on the king's horse and like a footman, to conduct him through the streets of the city, and like a mere herald, to announce his triumph.

"Oh! scenes surpassing fable, and yet true."

Who could have imagined that the noblest lord in all the dominions of Ahasuerus — a descendant of the house of Agag — should be compelled thus to wait upon a poor Jew, and such a Jew, at such a moment? Surely the finger of the Almighty was in all this. Who but an infidel, an atheist or a skeptic could question a truth so obvious?

Thus much as to the providence of God. Let us now look at the pride of Haman. Despite all his dignity, wealth and splendor, his wretched heart was wounded by one little matter, not worth a thought in the judgment of a really great mind or a well-regulated heart. He was rendered miserable by the simple fact that Mordecai would not bow to him! Although he occupied the nearest place to the throne and was entrusted with the king's ring — although possessed of princely wealth and placed in a princely station, “yet” he says, “all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate” (Esther 5: 13). Miserable man! The highest position, the greatest wealth, the most extensive influence, the most flattering tokens of royal favor all “availed nothing” just because a poor Jew refused to bow to him! Such is the human heart! Such is man! Such is the world!

But “pride cometh before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Haman proved this. At the very moment when he seemed to be about to plant his foot on the loftiest summit of his ambition, a just and retributive providence so brought it about that he was obliged to wait upon Mordecai, and the very gallows which he had ordered to be prepared for his intended victim was used for his own execution!

Let us ask why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman? Did it not seem like a blind obstinacy to refuse the customary honor to the king's noblest lord — his highest officer? Assuredly not! Haman was the highest officer of Ahasuerus, but he was the greatest “enemy of Jehovah,” being the greatest “enemy of the Jews.” He was an Amalekite, and Jehovah had sworn that He would “have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Ex. 17: 16). How then could a true son of Abraham bow to one with whom Jehovah was at war? Impossible! Mordecai could save the life of an Ahasuerus, but he never could bow to an Amalekite. As a faithful Jew, he walked too closely with the God of his fathers to pay attention to one of the seed of Amalek.

Hence Mordecai's stern refusal to bow to Haman was not the fruit of a blind obstinacy and senseless pride, but of lovely faith *in* and high communion *with* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He could never relinquish the dignity which belonged to the Israel of

God. He would abide by faith under Jehovah's banner, and while so abiding he could never do obeisance to an Amalekite. What though His people were "scattered and peeled" — "though their beautiful house" was in ruins — though Jerusalem's ancient glory was departed — was faith therefore to abandon the high position assigned by God's counsels to His people? By no means. Faith would recognize the ruin and walk softly. At the same time, faith laid hold of God's promise and occupied in holy dignity the platform which that promise had opened up for all who believed it. Mordecai was made to feel deeply the ruin. He clothed himself in sackcloth, but he would never bow to an Amalekite.

What was the result? His sackcloth was exchanged for royal apparel. His place at the king's gate was exchanged for a place next to the throne. He realized in his own happy experience the truth of that ancient promise that Israel should be "the head and not the tail." Thus it was with this faithful Jew of old. He took his stand on that elevated ground where faith ever places the soul. He shaped his way, not according to nature's view of things around, but according to faith's view of the Word of God. Nature might say, "Why not lower your standard of action to the level of your circumstances? Why not suit yourself to your outward condition? Had you not better acknowledge the Amalekite, seeing that the Amalekite is in the place of power?" Nature might speak thus, but faith's answer was simple: "Jehovah hath sworn that He will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Thus it is ever. Faith lays hold of *the living God and His eternal Word*, and abides in peace and walks in holy elevation.

Christian reader, may the hallowed instruction of the Book of Esther be brought home to our souls in the power of the Holy Spirit. In it, we see the providence of God, the pride of man, the power of faith. Moreover we are furnished with a striking picture of the actings of Jehovah on behalf of His people Israel — the sudden overthrow of their last proud oppressor, their restoration and their everlasting blessedness, rest and glory.

Job

Job and His Friends.

The book of Job occupies a very peculiar place in the volume of God. It possesses character entirely its own, and teaches lessons which are not to be learnt in any other section of inspiration. It is not by any means our purpose to enter upon a line of argument to prove the genuineness, or establish the fact of the Divine inspiration, of this precious book. We take these things for granted; being fully persuaded of them as established facts, we leave the proofs to abler hands. We receive the book of Job as part of the Holy Scriptures given of God for the profit and blessing of His people. We need no proofs of this for ourselves, nor do we attempt to offer any to our reader.

And we may further add, that we have no thought of entering upon the field of inquiry as to the authorship of this book. This, how interesting soever it may be in itself, is to us entirely secondary. We receive the book from God. This is enough for us. We heartily own it to be an inspired document, and we do not feel it to be our province to discuss the question as to where, when, or by whom it was penned. In short, we purpose, with the Lord's help, to offer a few plain and practical remarks on a book which we consider needs to be more closely studied, that it may be more fully understood. May the Eternal Spirit, who indited the book, expound and apply it to our souls!

The opening page of this remarkable book furnishes us with a view of the patriarch Job, surrounded by everything that could make the world agreeable to him, and make him of importance in the world. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." Thus much as to what *he was*. Let us now see *what he had*.

"And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses,

and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the children of the east. And his sons went and feasted in their houses every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters, to eat and to drink with them." Then, to complete the picture, we have the record of *what he did*.

"And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually."

Here, then, we have a very rare specimen of a man. He was perfect, upright, God-fearing, and eschewed evil. Moreover, the hand of God had hedged him round about on every side, and strewed his path with richest mercies. He had all that heart could wish, — children and wealth in abundance, — honour and distinction from all around. In short, we may almost say his cup of earthly bliss was full.

But Job needed to be tested. There was a deep moral root in his heart which had to be laid bare. There was self-righteousness which had to be brought to the surface and judged. Indeed, we may discern this root in the very words which we have just quoted. He says, "It may be that my sons have sinned." He does not seem to contemplate the possibility of sinning himself. A soul really self-judged, thoroughly broken before God, truly sensible of its own state, tendencies, and capabilities, would think of his own sins, and his own need of a burnt-offering.

Now, let the reader distinctly understand that Job was a real saint of God, — a Divinely quickened soul, — a possessor of Divine and eternal life. We cannot too strongly insist upon this. He was just as truly a man of God in the first chapter as he was in the forty-second. If we do not see this, we shall miss one of the grand lessons of the book. Job 1:8 establishes this point beyond all question. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?"

But, with all this, Job had never sounded the depths of his own heart. He did not know himself: He had never really grasped the truth of his own utter ruin and total depravity. He had never learnt to say, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." This point must be seized, or the book of Job will not be understood. We shall not see the specific object of all those deep and painful exercises through which Job was called to pass, unless we lay hold of the solemn fact that his conscience had never been really in the Divine presence, — that he had never seen himself in the light, — never measured himself by a Divine standard, — never weighed himself in the balances of the sanctuary.

If the reader will turn for a moment to Job 29, he will find a striking proof of what we assert. He will there see distinctly what a strong and deep root of self-complacency there was in the heart of this dear and valued servant of God; and how this root was nourished by the very tokens of Divine favour with which he was surrounded. This chapter is a pathetic lament over the faded light of other days; and the very tone and character of the lament prove how necessary it was that Job should be stripped of everything, in order that he might learn himself in the searching light of the Divine presence.

Let us hearken to his words.

"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle; when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me; when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil; when I went out to the gate through the city; when I prepared my seat in the street! The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth. Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. And they waited for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain. If I laughed on them, they believed it not; and the light of my countenance they cast not down. I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners. But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock."

This, truly, is a most remarkable utterance. We look in vain for any breathings of a broken and a contrite spirit here. There are no evidences of self-loathing, or even of self-distrust. We cannot find so much as a single expression of conscious weakness and nothingness. In the course of this single chapter, Job refers to himself more than forty times, while the references to God are but five. It reminds us of the seventh of Romans, by the predominance of "I;" but there is this immense difference, that, in the seventh of Romans, "I" is a poor, weak, good-for-nothing, wretched creature in the presence of the holy law of God; whereas, in Job 29, "I" is a most important, influential personage admired and almost worshipped by his fellows.

Now Job had to be stripped of all this; and when we compare Job 29 with Job 30 we can form some idea of how painful the process of stripping must have been. There is peculiar emphasis in the words, "*But now.*" Job draws a most striking contrast between his past and his present. In Job 30 he is still occupied with himself. It is still "I;" but ah! how changed. The very men who flattered him in the day of his prosperity, treat him with contempt in the day of his adversity. Thus it is ever in this poor, false, deceitful world, and it is

well to be made to prove it. All must, sooner or later, find out the hollowness of the world, — the fickleness of those who are ready to cry out "hosanna" today, and "crucify Him" tomorrow. Man is not to be trusted. It is all very well while the sun shines; but wait till the nipping blasts of winter come, and then you will see how far nature's fair promises and professions can be trusted. When the prodigal had plenty to spend, he found plenty to share his portion; but when he began to be in want, "no man gave unto him."

Thus it was with Job in Job 30. But be it well remembered, that there is very much more needed than the stripping of self, and the discovery of the hollowness and deceitfulness of the world. One may go through all these, and the result be merely chagrin and disappointment. Indeed it can be nothing more if God be not reached. If the heart be not brought to find its all-satisfying, portion in God, then a reverse of fortune leaves it desolate; and the discovery of the fickleness and hollowness of men fills it with bitterness. This will account for Job's language in Job 30. "But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock." Was this the spirit of Christ? Would Job have spoken thus at the close of the book? He would not. Ah! no, reader; when once Job got into God's presence, there was an end to the egotism of Job 29 and the bitterness of Job 30.

{The reader will bear in mind that, while it is the Holy Ghost who records what Job and his friends said, yet we are not to suppose that they spoke by inspiration.}

But hear Job's further outpourings. "They were children of fools, yea, children of base men; they were viler than the earth. And now am I their song, yea, I am their by-word. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face. Because He hath loosed my cord, and afflicted me, they have also let loose the bridle before me. upon my right hand rise the youth; they push away my feet, and they raise up against me the ways of their destruction. They mar my path, they set forward my calamity, they have no helper. They came upon me as a wide breaking in of waters: in the desolation they rolled themselves upon me."

Now all this, we may truly say, is very far short of the mark. Lamentations over departed greatness, and bitter invectives against our fellowmen, will not do the heart much good; neither do they display aught of the spirit and mind of Christ, nor bring glory to His holy name. When we turn our eyes toward the blessed Lord Jesus we see something wholly different. That meek and lowly One met all the rebuffs of this world, all the disappointments in the midst of His people Israel, all the unbelief and folly of His disciples, with an, "Even so, Father." He was able to retire from the rebuffs of men into His resources in God, and then to come forth with those balmy words, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." No chagrin, no bitterness, no harsh invectives, nothing rough or unkind, from that gracious Saviour who came down into this cold and heartless world to manifest the perfect love of God, and who pursued His path of service spite Or all man's perfect hatred.

But the fairest and best of men must retire into the shade when tested by the perfect standard of the life of Christ. The light of His moral glory makes manifest the defects and blemishes of even the most perfect of the sons of men. "In all things He must have the pre-eminence." He stands out in vivid contrast with even a Job or a Jeremiah in the matter of patient submission to all that He was called upon to endure. Job completely breaks down under his heavy trials. He not only pours forth a torrent of bitter invective upon his fellows, but actually curses the day of his birth. "After this opened Job his mouth and cursed his day. And Job spake and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a manchild conceived" (Job 3:1-3).

We notice the self-same thing in Jeremiah — that blessed man of God. He, too, gave way beneath the heavy pressure of his varied and accumulated sorrows, and gave vent to his feelings in the following bitter accents: "Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man-child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not; and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide. *Because he slew me not from the womb*; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her

womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (Jer. 20:14-18)

What language is here! Only think of cursing the man that brought tidings of his birth! cursing him because he had not slain him! All this, both in the prophet and the patriarch, contrasts strongly with the meek and lowly Jesus of Nazareth. 'That spotless One passed through deeper sorrows and more in number than all His servants put together; but not one murmuring word ever escaped His lips. He patiently submitted to all; and met the darkest hour with such words as these, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Blessed Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, we adore Thee! We bow down at Thy feet, lost in wonder, love, and praise, and own Thee Lord of all! — the fairest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.

There is no more fruitful field of study than that which is opened before us in the history of God's dealings with souls. It is full of interest, and abounds in instruction and profit. One grand object in those dealings is to produce real brokenness and humility — to strip us of all false righteousness, empty us of all self-confidence, and teach us to lean wholly upon Christ. All have to pass through what may be called the process of stripping and emptying. With some this process precedes, with others it follows, conversion or the new birth. Many are brought to Christ through deep ploughings and painful exercises of heart and conscience — exercises extending over years, often over the whole lifetime. Others, on the contrary, are brought with comparatively little exercise of soul. They lay hold, speedily, of the glad tidings of forgiveness of sins through the atoning death of Christ, and are made happy at once. But the stripping and emptying come afterwards, and, in many cases, cause the soul to totter on its foundation, and almost to doubt its conversion.

This is very painful, but very needful. The fact is, self must be learnt and judged, sooner or later. If it be not learnt in communion with God, it must be learnt by bitter experience in failures and falls. "No flesh shall glory in God's presence;" and we must all learn our utter powerlessness, in every respect, in order that we may taste the sweetness and comfort of the truth, that Christ is made of God unto

us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. God will have *broken material*. Let us remember this. It is a solemn and necessary truth "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." And again, "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 57:15; Isa. 66:1, 2).

These are seasonable words for all of us. One special want of the present moment is brokenness of Spirit. Nine-tenths of our trouble and difficulty may be traced to this want. It is marvellous how we get on from day to day, — in the family, in the assembly, in the world, in our entire practical life, when *self* is subdued and mortified. A thousand things which else would prove more than a match for our hearts are esteemed as nothing, when our souls are in a truly contrite state. We are enabled to bear reproach and insult, to overlook slights and affronts, to trample upon our crotchets, predilections, and prejudices, to yield to others where weighty principle is not involved, to be ready to every good work, to exhibit a genial large-heartedness in all our dealings, and an elasticity in all our moral movements which so greatly tend to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. How often, alas! it is otherwise with us. We exhibit a stiff, unyielding temper; we stand up for our rights; we maintain our interests; we look after our own things; we contend for our own notions. All this proves, very clearly, that self is not habitually measured and judged in the presence of God.

But, we repeat — and with emphasis — God will have broken material. He loves us too well to leave us in hardness and unsubduedness; and hence it is that He sees fit to pass us through all sorts of exercises in order to bring us into a condition of soul in which He can use us for His own glory. The will must be broken; self-confidence, self-complacency, and self-importance must be cut up by the roots. God will make use of the scenes and circumstances

through which we have to pass, the people with whom we are associated in daily life, to discipline the heart and subdue the will. And, further, He will deal with us directly Himself, in order to bring about these great practical results.

All this comes out with great distinctness in the book of Job, and gives a wonderful interest and charm to its pages. It is very evident that Job needed a severe sifting. Had he not needed it, we may rest assured the gracious, loving Lord would not have passed him through it. It was not for nothing that He let Satan loose upon His dear servant. We may say, with fullest confidence, that nothing but the most stern necessity would have led Him to adopt such a line of action. God loved Job with a perfect love; but it was a wise and faithful love; a love that could take account of everything, and, looking below the surface, could see the deep moral roots in the heart of His servant — roots which Job had never seen, and, therefore, never judged. What a mercy to have to do with such a God! to be in the hands of One who will spare no pains in order to subdue everything in us which is contrary to Himself, and to bring out in us His own blessed image!

But, beloved reader, is there not something profoundly interesting in the fact that God can even make use of Satan as an instrument in the discipline of His people? We see this in the case of the apostle Peter, as well as in that of the patriarch Job. Peter had to be sifted, and Satan was used to do the work." Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Here, too, there was a stern necessity. There was a deep root to be reached in Peter's heart — the root of self-confidence; and his faithful Lord saw it absolutely needful to pass him through a most severe and painful process in order that this root should be exposed and judged; and therefore Satan was permitted to sift him thoroughly, so that he might never again trust his own heart, but walk softly all his days. God will have broken material, whether it be in a patriarch or a apostle. All must be mellowed and subdued in order that the Divine glory may shine forth with an ever-brightening lustre.

Had Job understood this great principle — had he apprehended the Divine object, — how differently he would have carried himself!

But, like ourselves, he had to learn his lesson; and the Holy Ghost has furnished us with the record of the mode in which the lesson was learnt, so that we may profit by it also.

Let us pursue the narrative.

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? 'Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.'" What a view we have here of Satan's malignity! What a striking proof of the way in which he watches and considers the ways and works of God's people! What insight into human character! What an intimate knowledge of man's mental and moral constitution! What a terrible thing to fall into his hands! He is ever on the watch; ever ready, if permitted of God, to put forth all his malignant energy against the Christian.

The thought of this is most solemn, and should lead us to walk humbly and watchfully through a scene where Satan rules. He has no power whatever over a soul who abides in the place of dependence and obedience; and, blessed be God! he cannot, in any case, go one hair's breadth beyond the limit prescribed by Divine command. Thus, in Job's case, "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand."

Here Satan was permitted to lay his hand on Job's possessions — to bereave him of his children, and despoil him of all his wealth. And truly he lost no time in despatching his business. With marvellous rapidity he executed his commission. Blow after blow fell, in quick succession, on the devoted head of the patriarch.

Hardly had one messenger told his melancholy tale, ere another arrived with still heavier tidings, until, at length, the afflicted servant of God "arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:20-22).

All this is deeply touching. To speak after the manner of men, it was enough to make reason totter to be thus, in a moment, bereft of his ten children, and reduced from princely wealth to absolute penury. What a striking contrast between the opening and the closing lines of our first Job! In the former we see Job surrounded by a numerous family, and in the enjoyment of vast possessions; in the latter, we see him left alone, in poverty and nakedness. And to think of Satan's being allowed — yea, commissioned of God — to bring about all this! And for what? For the deep and permanent profit of Job's precious soul. God saw that His servant needed to be taught a lesson; and, moreover, that, in no other way, by no other means, could this lesson be taught, than by passing him through an ordeal the bare record of which fills the mind with solemn awe. God *will* teach His children, even though it be by stripping them of all that the heart clings to in this world.

But we must follow our patriarch into still deeper waters.

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, All that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold he is in

thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2:1-10). This is a very remarkable passage. It instructs us as to the place which Satan occupies in respect to God's government. He is a mere instrument, and, though ever ready to accuse the Lord's people, can do nothing save as he is allowed of God. So far as Job was concerned, the efforts of Satan proved abortive — and having done his utmost he goes away, and we hear nothing more of his actings, whatever may have been his inward temptations. Job was enabled to hold fast his integrity; and, had matters ended here, his patient endurance would only have strengthened the platform of his righteousness, and ministered to his self-complacency. "Ye have heard," says James, "of the patience of Job." And what then? "Ye have seen *the end of the Lord*; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Had it been simply a question of Job's patience, it would have proved an additional ground of self-confidence, and thus "the end of the Lord" would not have been reached. For, be it ever remembered, the Lord's pity and tender mercy can only be tasted by those who are truly penitent and broken-hearted. Now Job was not this, even when he lay amid the ashes. He was not yet thoroughly broken down before God. He was still the great man — great in his misfortunes as he had been in his prosperity — great beneath the keen and withering blasts of adversity as he had been in the sunshine of brighter and better days. Job's heart was still unreached. He was not yet prepared to cry out, "Behold, I am vile." he had not yet learnt to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes."

We are anxious that the reader should distinctly seize this point. It is, to a very great extent, the key to the entire book of Job. The Divine object was to expose to Job's view the depths of his own heart, in order that he might learn to delight in the grace and mercy of God and not in his own goodness, which was as a morning cloud and the early dew, that passeth away. Job was a true saint of God;

and all Satan's accusations were flung back in his face; but, all the while, Job was unbroken material, and therefore unprepared for "the end of the Lord" — that blessed end for every contrite heart — that end which is marked by "pity and tender mercy." God, blessed and praised be His name! will not suffer Satan to accuse us; but He will expose us to ourselves, so that we may judge ourselves, and thus learn to mistrust our own hearts, and rest in the eternal stability of his grace.

Thus far, then, we see Job "holding fast his integrity." He meets with calmness all the heavy afflictions which Satan is allowed to bring upon him; and, moreover, he refuses the foolish counsel of his wife. In a word, he accepts all as from the hand of God, and bows his head in the presence of His mysterious dispensations.

All this is well. But the arrival of Job's three friends produces a marked change. Their very presence — the bare fact of their being eye witnesses of his trouble — affects him in a very remarkable manner. "Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voices and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great" (Job 2:11-13)

Now, we can fully believe that those three men were governed, in the main, by kindly feelings toward Job; and it was no small sacrifice, on their part, to leave their homes and come to condole with their bereaved and afflicted friend. All this we can easily believe. But it is very evident that their presence had the effect of stirring up feelings and thoughts in his heart and mind which had hitherto lain dormant. He had borne submissively the loss of children, property, and of bodily health. Satan had been dismissed, and the wife's counsel rejected; but the presence of his friends caused Job to break down completely. "After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day."

This is very remarkable. It does not appear that the friends had spoken a single sentence. They sat in total silence, with rent garments and covered with dust, gazing on a grief too profound for them to reach. It was Job himself, who first broke silence: and the whole of the third chapter is an outpouring of the most bitter lamentation, affording melancholy evidence of an unsubdued spirit. It is, we may confidently assert, impossible that any one who had learnt in any little measure, to say "Thy will be done," could ever curse his day, or use the language contained in Job 3. It may, doubtless, be said, "It is easy for those to speak who have never been called to endure Job's heavy trials." This is quite true; and it may further be added, that no other man would have done one whit better under the circumstances. All this we can fully understand; but it in nowise touches the great moral of the book of Job — a moral which it is our privilege to seize. Job was a true saint of God; but he needed to learn himself, as we all do. He needed to have the roots of his moral being laid bare in his own sight, so that he might really abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes. And, furthermore, he needed a truer and deeper sense of what God was, so that he might trust Him and justify Him under all circumstances.

But we look in vain for aught of this in Job's opening address. "Job spake and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man-child conceived. . . . Why died I not from the womb?" These are not the accents of a broken and contrite spirit, or of one who had learnt to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." It is a grand point in the soul's history when one is enabled to bow with meekness to all the dispensations of our Father's hand. A broken will is a rich and rare endowment. It is a high attainment in the school of Christ to be able to say, "I have learnt, in whatsoever state I am, to be content" (Phil. 4:11). Paul had to *learn* this. It was not natural to him; and, most surely, he never learnt it at the feet of Gamaliel. Saul of Tarsus would never have been content with the very highest attainments in this world. He had to be thoroughly broken down at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth, ere he could say from his heart, "I am content." He had to ponder the meaning of those words, "My grace is sufficient for thee" ere he could "take pleasure in infirmities." The man who could use such language was standing at the very antipodes of the man

who could curse his day, and say, "Why died I not from the womb?" Only think of a saint of God, an heir of glory, saying, "Why died I not from the womb?" Ah! if Job had been in the presence of God he never could have uttered such words. He would have known full well why he had not died. He would have had a soul-satisfying sense of what God had in store for him. He would have justified God in all things. But Job was not in the presence of God, but in the presence of his friends; who proved, very distinctly, that they understood little or nothing of the character of God or the real object of His dealings with His dear servant Job.

It is not, by any means, our purpose to enter minutely into the lengthened discussion between Job and his friends — a discussion extending over twenty-nine chapters. We shall merely quote a few sentences from the opening address of each of the friends which will enable the reader to form an idea of the real ground occupied by these mistaken men.

Eliphaz was the first speaker. "Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, If we essay to commune with thee wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking? Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? *Even as I have seen*, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:1-8). And again, "*I have seen* the foolish taking root; but suddenly I cursed his habitation" (Job 5:3; see also Job 15:17).

From these sentences it seems very evident that Eliphaz belonged to that class of people who argue very much from their own *experience*. His motto was, "As I have seen." Now, what we have seen may be all true enough, so far as we are concerned. But it is a total mistake to found a general rule upon individual experience, and yet it is a mistake to which thousands are prone. What, for instance, had the experience of Eliphaz to do with Job? It may be he had never met a case exactly similar; and if there should happen to

be a single feature of dissimilarity between the two cases, then the whole argument based on experience must go for nothing. And that it went for nothing in Job's case is evident, for no sooner had Eliphaz ceased speaking, than, without the slightest attention to his words, Job proceeded with the tale of his own sorrows, intermingled with much self-vindication and bitter complaints against the Divine dealings (Job 6:7).

Bildad is the next speaker. He takes quite different ground from that occupied by Eliphaz. He never once refers to his own experience, or to what had come under his own observation. He appeals to antiquity. "Inquire, I pray thee, of *the former age*, and prepare thyself to the search of their *fathers*. (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow.) Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?" (Job 8:10)

Now, it must be admitted that Bildad conducts us into a much wider field than that of Eliphaz. The authority of a number of "fathers" has much more weight and respectability than the experience of a single individual. Moreover, it would argue much more modesty to be guided by the voice of a number of wise and learned men than by the light of one's own experience. But the fact is that neither experience nor tradition will do. The former may be true, so far as it goes, but you can hardly get two men whose experience will exactly correspond; and as to the latter, it is a mass of confusion, — for one father differs from another; and nothing can be more slippery or uncertain than the voice of tradition — the authority of the fathers.

Hence, as might be expected, Bildad's words had no more weight with Job than those of Eliphaz. The one was as far from the truth as the other. Had they appealed to Divine revelation, it would have been a different matter altogether. The *truth of God* is the only standard — the one grand authority. By that all must be measured; to that all must, sooner or later, bow down. No man has any right to lay down his own experience as a rule for his fellows; and if no man has a right, neither have any number of men. In other words, it is not the voice of man but the voice of God which must govern us all. It is not experience or tradition which shall judge at the last day, but the

word of God. Solemn and weighty fact! May we consider it! Had Bildad and Eliphaz understood it, their words would have had much more weight with their afflicted friend.

Let us now very briefly refer to the opening address of Zophar the Naamathite.

He says, "Oh that God would speak, and open His lips against thee, and that He would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth." And again: "*If* thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards Him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot: yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear" (Job 11:5, 6, 13-15).

These words savour strongly of *legality*. They prove very distinctly that Zophar had no right sense of the Divine character. He did not know God. No one possessing a true knowledge of God could speak of Him as opening His lips against a poor afflicted sinner, or as exacting aught from a needy, helpless creature. God is not against us, but for us, blessed for ever be His Name! He is not a legal exactor, but a liberal giver. Then again, Zophar says, "If thou prepare thine heart." But if not, what then? No doubt a man ought to prepare his heart, and if he were right he would. But then he is not right, and hence, when he sets about preparing his heart, he finds nothing there but evil. He finds himself perfectly powerless. What is he to do? Zophar cannot tell. No; nor can any of his school. How can they? They only know God as a stern exactor — as One who, if He opens His lips, can only speak against the sinner.

Need we marvel, therefore, that Zophar was as far from convincing Job as either of his two companions? They were all wrong. Legality, tradition, experience, were alike defective, one-sided, false. Not any one of them, or all of them put together, could meet Job's case. They only darkened counsel by words without knowledge. Not one of the three friends understood Job: and what is more, they did not know God's character or His object in dealing with His dear servant. They were wholly mistaken. They knew not how to present God to Job; and, as a consequence, they knew not

how to lead Job's conscience into the presence of God. In place of leading him to self-judgment, they only ministered to a spirit of self-vindication. They did not introduce God into the scene. They said some *true things*; but they had not the *truth*. They brought in experience, tradition, legality, but not the truth.

Hence the three friends failed to convince Job. Their ministry was one-sided, and instead of silencing Job, they only led him forth into a field of discussion which seemed almost boundless. He gives them word for word, and far more. "No doubt," he says, "but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But *I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you*: yea, who knoweth not such things as these? "What ye know, the same do I know also; I am not inferior to you." "Ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value. "O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom." "I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all. Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake my head at you." "How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times have ye reproached me; ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me." "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me."

All these utterances prove how far Job was from that true brokenness of spirit and humility of mind which ever flow from being in the Divine presence. No doubt the friends were wrong, quite wrong, — wrong in their notions about God, wrong in their method of dealing with Job. But their being wrong did not make him right. Had Job's conscience been in the presence of God, he would have made no reply to his friends, even though they had been a thousand times more mistaken and severe in their treatment. He would have meekly bowed his head, and allowed the tide of reproof and accusation to roll over him. He would have turned the very severity of his friends to profitable account, by viewing it as a wholesome moral discipline for his heart. But no; Job had not yet reached the end of himself. He was full of self-vindication, full of

invective against his fellows, full of mistaken thoughts about God. It needed another ministry to bring him into a right attitude of soul.

The more closely we study the lengthened discussion between Job and his three friends, the more clearly we must see the utter impossibility of their ever coming to an understanding. He was bent upon vindicating himself; and they were bent upon the very reverse. He was unbroken and unsubdued, and their mistaken course of treatment only tended to render him more so. Had they changed sides, they would have reached a different issue altogether. If Job had condemned himself; had he taken a low place, had he owned him self nothing and nobody, he would have left his friends nothing to say. And, on the other hand, had they spoken softly, tenderly, and soothingly to him, they would have been far more likely to melt him down. As it was, the case was hopeless. He could see nothing wrong in himself; and they could see nothing right. He was determined to maintain his integrity; and they were quite as determined to pick holes and find out flaws. There was no point of contact whatever — no common ground of understanding. He had no penitential breathings for them, and they had no tender compassions for him. They were travelling in entirely opposite directions, and never could meet. In a word, there was a demand for another kind of ministry altogether, and that ministry is introduced in the person of Elihu.

"So these three men ceased to answer Job [high time they should], because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job" (Job 32:1-3).

Here Elihu, with remarkable force and clearness, seizes upon the very root of the matter on each side. He condenses, in two brief sentences, the whole of the elaborate discussion contained in twenty-nine chapters. Job justified himself instead of justifying God: and they had condemned Job instead of leading him to condemn himself.

It is of the very last moral importance to see that, whenever we justify ourselves, we condemn God; and on the other hand, when we condemn ourselves, we justify God. "Wisdom is justified of all her children." This is a grand point. The truly broken and contrite heart will vindicate God at all cost. "Let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged" (Rom. 3:4) God must have the upper hand in the end; and it is the path of true wisdom to give Him the upper hand now. The very moment the soul is broken down in true self-judgment, God rises before it in all the majesty of His grace as a Justifier. But so long as we are ruled by a spirit of self-vindication or self-complacency, we must be total strangers to the deep blessedness of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness without works. The greatest folly that any one can be guilty of is to justify himself; inasmuch as God must then impute sin. But the truest wisdom is to condemn oneself utterly; for in that case God becomes the Justifier.

But Job had not yet learnt to tread this marvellously blessed path. He was still built up in his own goodness, still clothed in his own righteousness, still full of self-complacency. Hence the wrath of Elihu was kindled against him. Wrath must assuredly fall upon self-righteousness. It cannot be otherwise. The only true ground for a sinner to occupy is the ground of genuine repentance. Here there is nought but that pure and precious grace that reigns through righteousness by Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus it stands ever. There is nothing but wrath for the self-righteous — nothing but grace for the self-judged.

Reader, remember this. Pause for a moment and consider it. On what ground dost thou, at this moment, stand? Hast thou bowed before God in true repentance? Hast thou ever really measured thyself in His holy presence? Or, art thou on the ground of self-righteousness, self-vindication, and self-complacency? Do, we entreat you, weigh these solemn questions. Do not put them aside. We are most anxious to deal with the heart and conscience of the reader. We do not write merely for the understanding for the mind, for the intelligence. No doubt, it is well to seek to enlighten the understanding, by the word of God, but we should exceedingly

regret if our work were to end here. There is far more than this. God wants to deal with the heart, with the moral being, with the inward man. He will have us real before Him. It is of no possible use to build ourselves up in self-opinionativeness; for nothing is surer than that everything of that kind must be broken up. The day of the Lord will be against everything high and lifted up; and hence it is our wisdom now to be low and broken down; for it is from the low place that we get the very best view of God and His salvation. May the reader be led by God's Spirit into the reality of all this! May we all remember that God delights in a broken and contrite spirit — that He ever finds His abode with such; but the proud He knoweth afar off.

Thus, then, we may understand why Elihu's wrath was kindled against Job. He was entirely on God's side. Job was not. We hear nothing of Elihu until Job 32, though it is very evident that he had been an attentive listener to the whole discussion. He had given a patient hearing to both sides, and he found that both were wrong. Job was wrong in seeking to defend himself; and the friends were wrong in seeking to condemn him.

How often is this the case in our discussions and controversies! And oh, what sorrowful work it is! In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred in the which persons are at issue, it will be found to be very much as it was with Job and his friends. A little brokenness on one side, or a little softness on the other, would go a great way towards settling the question. We speak not, of course, of cases in which the truth of God is concerned. There, one must be bold, decided, and unyielding. To yield where the truth of God or the glory of Christ is concerned, would be disloyalty to the One to whom we owe everything. Plain decision and unflinching firmness alone become us in all cases in which it is a question of the claims of that blessed One who, when our interests were concerned, surrendered everything, even life itself, in order to secure them. God forbid we should drop a sentence or pen a line which might have the effect of releasing our grasp of truth, or abating our ardour in contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Ah! no, reader; this is not the moment for ungirding the loins, laying aside the harness, or lowering the standard. Quite the reverse. Never was there more

urgent need of having the loins girt about with truth, of having firm footing, and of maintaining the standard of Divine principle in all its integrity. We say this advisedly. We say it in view of all the efforts of the enemy to drive us off the platform of pure truth by referring us to those who have failed in the maintenance of pure morals. Alas! alas! there is failure — sad, humiliating failure. We do not deny it. Who could? It is too patent — too flagrant — too gross. The heart bleeds as we think of it. Man fails always and everywhere. His history, from Eden to the present hour, is stamped with failure.

All this is undeniable. But, blessed be God! His foundation standeth sure, nor can human failure ever touch it. God is faithful. He knoweth them that are His; and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. We have yet to learn that the way to improve our morals is to lower God's standard. We do not and cannot believe it. Let us humble ourselves in view of our failure; but never surrender the precious truth of God.

But all this is a digression into which we have allowed ourselves to be drawn in order to guard against the thought that, in urging upon the reader the importance of cultivating a broken, yielding spirit, we would have him to yield a single jot or tittle of Divine revelation. We must now return to our subject.

There is something peculiarly marked and striking in the ministry of Elihu. He stands in vivid contrast with the three friends. His name signifies "God is he;" and, no doubt, we may view him as a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. He brings God into the scene, and puts a complete stop to the weary strife and contention between Job and his friends. Elihu argues not on the ground of experience; he appeals not to tradition; he breathes not the accents of legality; he brings in God. This is the only way of putting a stop to controversy, of hushing strife, of ending a war of words. Let us hearken to the words of this remarkable personage.

"Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he. When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled." Note this, "There was no answer." In all their reasonings, in all their arguments, in all their references to experience, tradition, and

legality, there was "no answer." This is very instructive. Job's friends had travelled over a very wide range, had said many true things, had attempted many replies; but, be it carefully noted, they found "no answer." It is not in the range of earth or of nature to find an answer for a self-righteous heart God alone can answer it, as we shall see in the sequel. To all else but God the unbroken heart can find a ready reply. This is most strikingly proved in the history now before us. Job's three friends found no answer. "And Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, answered and said, I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show my opinion. I said, days should speak [but alas! they either do not speak at all, or they speak a quantity of error and folly], and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." Here Divine light, the light of inspiration, begins to stream in upon the scene, and to roll away the thick clouds of dust raised by the strife of tongues. We are conscious of moral power and weight the very moment this blessed servant opens his lips. We feel we are listening to a man who speaks as the oracles of God — a man who is sensibly standing in the Divine presence. It is not a man drawing from the meagre store of his own narrow and one-sided experience; nor yet a man appealing to a hoary antiquity, or to a bewildering tradition, or the ever conflicting voices of the fathers. No; we have before us now a man who introduces us at once into the very presence of "the inspiration of the Almighty."

This is the only sure authority — the only unerring standard. "Great men are not always wise; neither do the aged understand judgment.

[What would Elihu have said to the recent dogma of the infallibility of a man — a dogma accepted by over five hundred rational beings sitting in solemn conclave? And this is to be henceforth part and parcel of the faith of Christians! Not long since men were called upon to believe in *an immaculate woman*, now they are called upon to believe in *an infallible man*! What is to come next? Surely the "strong delusion" must soon set in, when men will be compelled, by God's judicial dealings, to believe a lie, because they would not believe the truth. May the eternal Spirit put forth His

mighty energy in the conversion of precious souls ere the day of vengeance sets in!]

Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will show my opinion. Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say. Yea, I attended unto you, and, behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words: lest ye should say, We have found out wisdom: God thrusteth him down, not man. Now he hath not directed his words against me: neither will I answer him with your speeches. They were amazed; they answered no more; they left off speaking." Experience, tradition, and legality are all swept off the platform to leave room for the "inspiration of the Almighty" — for the direct and powerful ministry of the Spirit of God.

The ministry of Elihu breaks upon the soul with peculiar power and fulness. It stands in vivid contrast with the one-sided and most defective ministry of the three friends. Indeed it is quite a relief to reach the close of a controversy which seemed likely to prove interminable — a controversy between intense egotism on the one hand, and experience, tradition, and legality on the other — a controversy barren of any good, so far as Job was concerned, and leaving all parties at the close very much where they were at the beginning.

Still, however, the controversy is not without its value and interest to us. It teaches us, very distinctly, that when two parties join issue, they never can reach an understanding unless there be a little brokenness and subduedness on one side or the other. This is a valuable lesson, and one to which we all need to give attention. There is a vast amount of headiness and high-mindedness abroad, not only in the world but in the Church. There is a great deal of self-occupation — a quantity of "I, I, I" — and that, too, even where we least suspect it, and where it is, most of all, unsightly, namely, in connection with the holy service of Christ. Never, we may safely assert, is egotism more truly detestable than when it shows itself in the service of that blessed One who made Himself of no reputation - whose whole course was one of perfect self-surrender, from first to last — who never sought His own glory in anything, never maintained His own interest, never pleased Himself.

And yet, for all that, reader, is there not a most deplorable amount of hateful, unsubdued self displayed on the platform of Christian profession and Christian service? Alas! we cannot deny it. We are disposed to marvel, as the eye scans the record of the remarkable discussion between Job and his friends; we are amazed to find close upon a hundred references to himself in Job 29-31 alone. In short, it is all "I" from beginning to end.

But, let us look to ourselves. Let us judge our own hearts in their deeper workings. Let us review our ways in the light of the Divine presence. Let us bring all our work and service, and have it weighed in the holy balances of the sanctuary of God. Then shall we discover how much of hateful self is insinuated, like a dark and defiling tissue, into the whole web of our Christian life and service. How, for example, comes it to pass that we are so ready to mount the high horse when self is touched, even in the most remote degree? Why are we so impatient of reproof, be it clothed in language ever so refined and gentle? Why so ready to take offence at the slightest disparagement of self? And, further, why is it that we find our sympathies and our regards and our predilections going out, with special energy, after those who think well of us — who value our ministry, agree with our opinions, and adopt our *cue*?

Do not all these things tell a tale? Do they not prove to us that, ere we condemn the egotism of our ancient patriarch, we should seek to get rid of a vast amount of our own? It is not, surely, that he was right: but we are far more wrong. It is far less to be wondered at that a man, amid the dim twilight of the far-back patriarchal age, was entangled in the snare of self-occupation, than that we, in the full blaze of Christianity, should fall thereinto. Christ had not come. No prophetic voice had fallen on the ear. Even the law had not been given, when Job lived, and spoke, and thought. We can form a very poor conception indeed of the tiny ray of light by which men had to walk in the days of Job. But to us pertain the high privilege and holy responsibility of walking in the very meridian light of a full-orbed Christianity. Christ has come. He has lived, died, risen, and gone back to heaven. He has sent down the Holy Ghost to dwell in our hearts, as the witness of His glory, the seal of accomplished redemption, and the earnest of the inheritance, until the redemption

of the purchased possession. The canon of Scripture is closed. The circle of revelation is complete. The word of God is filled up. We have before us the Divine record of the self-emptied One who went about doing good — the marvellous story of what He did, and how He did it, of what He said, and how He said it, of who He was, and what He was. We know that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that He condemned sin and put it away; that our old nature — that odious thing called self, sin, the flesh — has been crucified and buried out of God's sight — made an end of for ever, so far as its power over us is concerned. Moreover we are made partakers of the Divine nature; we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us; we are members of Christ's body, of His flesh, and of His bones; we are called to walk even as He walked; we are heirs of glory - heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

What did Job know of all this? Nothing. How could he know what was not revealed till fifteen centuries after his time? The full extent of Job's knowledge is poured upon us in those few glowing and impassioned words at the close of Job 19. "Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though, after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

This was Job's knowledge — this was his creed. There was a great deal in it, in one sense; but very little indeed, when compared with the mighty circle of truths in the midst of which we are privileged to move. Job looked forward, through the dim twilight, to something that was to be done in the far-off future. We look back, from amid the full flood-tide of Divine revelation, to something that has been done. Job could say of his Redeemer that "He *shall* stand in the latter day upon the *earth*." We know that our Redeemer sitteth on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, after having lived and laboured and died on the earth.

In short, the measure of Job's light and privilege admits of no comparison with that which we enjoy; and for this reason it is the

less excusable in us to indulge in the varied forms of egotism and self-occupation. Our self-abnegation should be in proportion to the measure of our spiritual privilege. But alas! it is not so. We profess the very highest truths; but our character is not formed, nor is our conduct governed, by them. We speak of the heavenly calling; but our ways are earthly, sometimes sensual, or worse. We profess to enjoy the very highest standing; but our state does not comport therewith. Our real condition does not answer to our assumed position. We are high-minded, touchy, tenacious, and easily provoked. We are quite as ready to embark in the business of self-vindication as was our patriarch Job.

And then, on the other hand, when we feel called upon to approach another in the attitude and tone of reproof, with what rudeness, coarseness, and harshness we discharge the necessary work! How little softness of tone or delicacy of touch! How little of the tender and the soothing! How little of the "excellent oil!" How little of the broken heart and weeping eye! What slender ability to bring our erring brother down into the dust! Why is this? Simply because we are not habitually in the dust ourselves. If, on the one hand, we fail quite as much as Job in the matter of egotism and self-vindication, so, on the other, we prove ourselves fully as incompetent as Job's friends to produce self-judgment in our brother. For example, how often do we parade our own experience, like Eliphaz; or indulge in a legal spirit, like Zophar; or introduce human authority, like Bildad! How little of the spirit and mind of Christ! How little of the power of the Holy Ghost, or the authority of the word of God!

It is not pleasant to write thus. Quite the contrary. But it is pressed upon us, and we must write. We feel, most solemnly, the growing laxity and indifference of the day in which we live. There is something perfectly appalling in the disproportion between our profession and practice. The highest truths are professed in immediate connection with gross worldliness and self-indulgence. Indeed, it would appear as though, in some cases, the higher the doctrines professed, the lower the walk. There is a wide diffusion of truth in our midst; but where is its formative power? Floods of light are poured upon the intelligence; but where are the profound

exercises of heart and conscience in the presence of God? The rigid rule of precise and accurate statement is attended to; but where is the true practical result? Sound doctrine is unfolded in the letter; but where is the spirit? There is the form of words; but where is the living exponent?

Is it that we do not prize sound doctrine and accurate statement? Is it that we undervalue the wide diffusion of precious truth, in its very highest forms? Far, far away be the thought! Human language would utterly fail to set forth our estimate of these things. God forbid we should pen a line which might tend, in any wise, to lower, in the mind of the reader, the sense of the unspeakable value and importance of a lofty — yea, the very loftiest — standard of truth and sound doctrine. We are most thoroughly convinced that we shall never improve our morals by lowering, the breadth of a hair, the standard of principle.

But, Christian reader, we would lovingly and solemnly ask you, Does it not strike you that there is, in our very midst, a most melancholy lack of the tender conscience and the exercised heart? Does our practical piety keep pace with our profession of principle? Is the standard of morals at all up to the standard of doctrine?

Ah! we anticipate the reply of the grave and thoughtful reader. We know too well the terms in which that reply must be couched. It is but too plain that the truth does not act on the conscience — that the doctrine does not shine in the life — that the practice does not correspond with the profession.

We speak for ourselves. As God is our witness, we pen these lines, in His presence, in a spirit of self-judgment. It is our hearty desire that the knife should enter into our own soul, and reach the deep roots of things there. The Lord knows how much we should prefer laying the axe to the root of self and there leave it to do its work. But we feel we have a sacred duty to discharge to the individual reader and to the Church of God; and, moreover, we feel that that duty would not be discharged were we merely to set forth the precious, and the beautiful, and the true. We are convinced that God would have us not only to be exercised in heart and conscience

ourselves, but also to seek to exercise the hearts and consciences of all with whom we have to do.

True it is — a truth often stated and proved - that worldliness, and carnality, and self-indulgence in all its phases, in the wardrobe, the library, the equipage, and the table — that fashion and style, folly and vanity, pride of *caste*, of intellect, and of purse — none of these things can be talked down, written, lectured, or scolded down. This we fully believe. But must not conscience be addressed? Must not the voice of holy exhortation fall on the ear? Shall we suffer laxity, indifferentism, and Laodicean lukewarmness to pave the way for a universal scepticism, infidelity, and practical atheism, and not be roused in conscience ourselves, and seek to rouse others? God forbid! No doubt, the higher and the better way is to have the evil expelled by the good; to have the flesh subdued by the Spirit; to have self displaced by Christ; to have the love of the world supplanted by the love of the Father. All this we fully feel and freely admit; but, while feeling and admitting all this, we must still press upon our own conscience, and that of the reader, the urgent demand for solemn and searching review — for deep searchings of heart in the secret of the presence of God — for profound self-judgment, in reference to our whole career. Blessed be God! we can carry on these exercises before the throne of grace, the precious mercy-seat. "Grace reigns." Precious consoling sentence! Should it prevent exercise of soul? Nay, it should only impart the right tone and character thereto. We have to do with victorious grace, not that we may indulge self, but mortify it all the more thoroughly.

May the Lord make us really humble, earnest, and devoted! May the deep utterance of the heart, both of the writer and the reader, be, "Lord, I am Thine — Thine only, Thine wholly, Thine for ever!"

This may seem to some a digression from our special theme; but we trust the digression may not be in vain; but that, by the grace of God, it will yield something for the heart and conscience of both the writer and the reader; and thus we shall be better prepared to understand and appreciate the powerful ministry of Elihu, to which we shall now turn our attention, in dependence upon Divine guidance.

The reader cannot fail to notice the double bearing of this remarkable ministry — its bearing upon our patriarch, and its bearing upon his friends. This is only what we might expect. Elihu, as we have already remarked, had patiently listened to the arguments on both sides. He had, as we say, heard both parties out. He had allowed them to exhaust themselves — to say all they had to say: "Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he." This was in lovely moral order. It was, most surely, the way of the Spirit of God. Modesty, in a young man, is most graceful. Would there were more of it in our midst! Nothing is more attractive, in the young, than a quiet, retiring spirit. When real worth lies concealed beneath a modest and humble exterior, it is sure to draw the heart with irresistible power. But, on the other hand, nothing is more repulsive than the bold self-confidence — the pushing forwardness, and self-conceit of many of the young men of the present day. All such persons would do well to study the opening words of Elihu, and to imitate his example.

"And Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, answered and said, I am young, and ye are very old: wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom." This is the natural order. We expect hoary heads to contain wisdom; and, hence, it is but right and comely for young men to be swift to hear, slow to speak, in the presence of their elders. We may set it down as an almost fixed principle, that a forward young man is not led by the Spirit of God — that he has never measured himself in the Divine presence — that he has never been thoroughly broken down before God.

No doubt, it may often happen, as in the case of Job and his friends, that old men give utterance to very foolish things. Grey hairs and wisdom do not always go together; and it not infrequently happens that aged men, relying upon the mere fact of their years, assume a place for which they have no sort of power, either moral, intellectual, or spiritual. All this is perfectly true, and it has to be considered by those whom it may concern. But it leaves wholly untouched the fine moral sentiment contained in Elihu's opening address: "I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion." This is always right. It is

always comely for a young man to be afraid to show his opinion. We may rest assured that a man who possesses inward moral power — who, as we say, *has it in him* — is never in haste to push himself forward; but yet, when he does come forward, he is sure to be heard with respect and attention. The union of modesty and moral power imparts an irresistible charm to the character; but the most splendid abilities are marred by a self-confident style

"But," continues Elihu, "there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." This introduces another element altogether. The moment the Spirit of God enters the scene, it ceases to be a question of youth or old age, inasmuch as He can speak by old or young. "Not by might or by power; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." This holds good always. It was true for the patriarchs; true for the prophets; true for apostles; true for us; true for all. It is not by human might or power, but by the eternal Spirit.

Here lay the deep secret of Elihu's quiet power. He was filled with the Spirit, and hence we forget his youth, while hearkening to the words of spiritual weight and heavenly wisdom that proceed out of his mouth, and we are reminded of Him who spake as one having authority, and not as the scribes. There is a striking difference between a man who speaks as an oracle of God, and one who speaks in mere official routine — between one who speaks from the heart, by the Spirit's holy unction, and one who speaks from the intellect by human authority. Who can duly estimate the difference between these two? None but those who possess and exercise the mind of Christ.

But let us proceed with Elihu's address. "Great men," he tells us, "are not always wise." How true! "Neither do the aged understand judgment. Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will show mine opinion. Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say. Yea, I attended unto you, and, behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words."

Let us specially note this. "There was none of you that convinced Job." This was clear enough. Job was just as far from

being convinced at the close of the discussion as he was at the commencement. Indeed we may say that each fresh argument drawn from the treasury of experience, tradition, and legality, only served to stir some fresh and deeper depth of Job's unjudged, unsubdued, unmortified nature. This is a grand moral truth, illustrated on every page of the book which lies open before us.

But how instructive the reason for all this! "Lest ye should say, We have found out wisdom; God thrusteth him down, not man." No flesh shall glory in the presence of God. It may boast itself outside. It may put forth its pretensions, and glory in its resources, and be proud of its undertakings, so long as God is not thought of. But only introduce Him, and all the vauntings, the boastings, the vain-gloryings, the lofty pretensions, the self-complacency, and the self-conceit will be withered up in a moment.

Reader, let us remember this. "Boasting is excluded." Yes; all boasting — the boasting of Job, the boasting of his friends. If Job had succeeded in establishing his cause, he would have boasted. If, on the other hand, his friends had succeeded in silencing him, they might have boasted. But no; "God thrusteth him down, not man."

Thus it was; thus it is; and thus it must ever be. God knows how to humble the proud heart and subdue the stubborn will. It is utterly vain for any one to set himself up; for we may rest assured that every one who is set up must, sooner or later, be up-set. The moral government of God has so ordered and enacted that all that is high and lifted up must come down. This is a salutary truth for us all; but especially for the young, the ardent, and the aspiring. It is well to keep in the shade, for there it is we most enjoy the sunshine. This may seem a paradox, but, to faith, it is plain. The humble, retired, shady path is, unquestionably, the safest, the happiest, and the best. May we ever be found treading it, until we reach that bright and blessed scene where pride and ambition are unknown!

The effect of Elihu's opening words upon Job's three friends was most striking. "They were amazed; they answered no more; they left off speaking. When I had waited — for they spake not, but stood still, and answered no more — I said, I will answer also my part; I also will show mine opinion." And then, lest any should suppose

that he was speaking his own words, he adds, "For I am full of matter; the spirit within me constraineth me." This is the true spring and power of all ministry, in all ages. It must be "the inspiration of the Almighty," or it is worth absolutely nothing.

We repeat, this is the only true source of ministry, at all times and in all places. And, in saying this, we do not forget that a mighty change took place when our Lord Christ ascended to heaven and took His seat at the right hand of God, in virtue of accomplished redemption. To this glorious truth we have often referred the readers of our magazine, *Things New and Old*; and, hence, we shall not now permit ourselves to dwell upon it. We merely touch upon it in this place, lest the reader might imagine that, when we speak of the true source of ministry in all ages, we were forgetting what is marked and distinctive in the Church of God now, in consequence of the death and resurrection of Christ, the presence and indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the individual believer, and in the Church, which is the body of Christ on earth. Far from it. Thanks and praise be to God! we have too deep a sense of the value, importance, and practical weight of that grand and glorious truth ever to lose sight of it for a moment. Indeed it is just this deep sense, together with the remembrance of Satan's ceaseless effort to ignore the truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, that leads us to pen this cautionary paragraph.

Still, Elihu's principle must ever hold good. If any man is to speak with power and practical effect, he must be able, in some measure, to say, "I am full of matter; the spirit within me constraineth me.* Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak, that I may be refreshed: I will open my lips and answer." Thus it must ever be, in measure at least, with all who will speak, with real power and effect, to the hearts and consciences of their fellows. We are forcibly reminded, by Elihu's glowing words, of that memorable passage in the seventh of John, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." True it is that Elihu knew not the glorious truth set forth in these words of our Lord, inasmuch as they were not made good till fifteen centuries after his time. But then he knew the principle — he possessed the

germ of what was afterwards to come out in full flow and rich mellow fruit. He knew that a man, if he is to speak with point, pungency, and power, must speak by the inspiration of the Almighty. He had listened till he was tired, to men talking a quantity of powerless matter — saying some truisms — drawing from their own experience, or from the musty stores of human tradition. He was well-nigh wearied out with all this, and he rises, in the mighty energy of the Spirit, to address his hearers as one fitted to speak like an oracle of God.

{*Let the reader distinctly understand that Elihu, in the above quotation. speaks not of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as believers now know it. This was wholly unknown to saints in Old Testament times, and was the direct result of accomplished redemption — the special fruit of the glorification of Christ, at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. This important truth has been repeatedly referred to and dwelt upon at other times, and hence we shall not go into it now but we would request the reader to turn to John 7:39, and John 16:7, and meditate upon the doctrine there taught, apart from all preconceived thoughts of his own, and irrespective of all the opinions of men. From these Scriptures he will see distinctly that the Holy Ghost did not and could not come, until Jesus was glorified. This is not a mere speculation — a human theory — the dogma of a certain school. It is a grand foundation truth of Christianity, to be reverently received tenaciously held, and faithfully confessed by every true Christian. May all the Lord's people be led to see and believe it!}

Here lies the deep and blessed secret of ministerial power and success. "If any man speak, says Peter, "let him speak as the oracles of God." It is not, be it carefully observed, merely speaking according to Scripture — an all-important and essential matter, most surely. It is more. A man may rise and address his fellows for an hour, and, from beginning to end of his discourse, he may not utter so much as a single unscriptural sentence; and all the while, he may not have been God's oracle at the time; he may not have been God's mouthpiece, or the present exponent of His mind to the souls before him.

This is peculiarly solemn, and demands the grave consideration of all who are called to open their lips in the midst of God's people. It is one thing to utter a certain amount of true sentiment, and quite another to be the living channel of communication between the very heart of God and the souls of God's people. It is this latter, and this alone, that constitutes true ministry. A man who speaks according to this most excellent principle will so affect the hearts and consciences of his hearers that each one will feel tempted to think that some one has been telling tales to the speaker, and revealing to him the very feelings of his own heart. In short, a man who speaks as an oracle of God will bring the conscience of the hearer so into the very light of the Divine presence, that every chamber of the heart is laid open, and every moral spring touched. This is true ministry. All else is powerless, valueless, fruitless. Nothing is more deplorable and humiliating than to listen to a man who is evidently drawing from his own poor and scanty resources, or trafficking in second-hand truth, in borrowed thoughts. Better far for such to be silent — better for their hearers, better for themselves. Nor this only. We may often hear a man giving forth to his fellows that on which his own mind has been dwelling in private with much interest and profit. He may utter truth, and important truth; but it is not *the* truth for the souls of the people — *the* truth for the moment. He has spoken according to Scripture, so far as his matter is concerned; but he has not spoken as an oracle of God.

Thus, then, may all learn a valuable lesson from Elihu; and, most surely, it is a needed lesson. Some may feel disposed to say it is a difficult lesson — a hard saying. But no; if we only live in the Lord's presence, in the abiding sense of our own nothingness and of His all-sufficiency, we shall know the precious secret of all effective ministry; we shall know how to lean upon God alone, and thus be independent of men, in the right sense; we shall be able to enter into the meaning and force of Elihu's further words, "Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person; neither let me give flattering titles unto man. For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away" (Job 32:21, 29).

In studying the ministry of Elihu, we find in it two grand elements, namely, "grace and truth." Both these were essential in

dealing with Job; and, consequently, we find both coming out with extraordinary power. He tells Job and his friends very distinctly that he knows not how to give flattering titles unto man. Here the voice of "truth" falls, with great clearness on the ear. Truth puts every one in his right place; and, just because it does so, it cannot bestow titles of flattery upon a poor guilty mortal, however much that mortal might be gratified by them. Man must be brought to know himself, to see his true condition, to confess what he really is. This was precisely what Job needed. He did not know himself, and his friends could not give him that knowledge. He needed to be led down into the depths; but his friends could not conduct him thither. He needed self-judgment; but his friends were wholly unable to produce it.

But Elihu begins by telling Job the truth. He introduces God into the scene in His true character. This was just what the three friends had failed to do. No doubt they had referred to God; but their references were cloudy, distorted, and false. This is plain from Job 42:7, 8, where we are told that, "The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for *ye have not spoken of me the thing* that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept; lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job." [The reader will bear in mind that the above words were spoken after Job's repentance. It is of the very last importance to see this.] They had utterly failed to bring God before the soul of their friend, and there they failed in producing the needed self-judgment.

Not so Elihu. He pursues a totally different line of things. He brings the light of "truth" to bear upon Job's conscience; and at the same time he administers the precious balm of "grace" to his heart. Let us quote his further sayings: "Wherefore, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth. My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart, and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life. If thou canst answer me, set thy

words in order before me, stand up. Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee."

In these accents, the ministry of "grace" unfolds itself, sweetly and powerfully, to the heart of Job. Of this most excellent ingredient there was a total absence in the ministry of the three friends. They showed themselves only too ready to bear down upon Job with "a heavy hand." They were stern judges, severe censors, false interpreters. They could fix their cold, grey eye upon the wounds of their poor afflicted friend, and wonder how they came there. They looked on the crumbling ruins of his house; and drew the harsh inference that the ruin was but the result of his bad behaviour. They beheld his fallen fortunes, and, with unmitigated severity, concluded that those fortunes had fallen because of his faults. They had proved themselves to be entirely one-sided judges. They had wholly misunderstood the dealings of God. They had never seized the full moral force of that one weighty sentence, "*God trieth the righteous.*" In a word, they were utterly astray. Their standpoint was false, and hence their whole range of vision was defective. There was neither "grace" nor "truth" in their ministry, and therefore they failed to convince Job. They condemned him without convincing him, whereas they ought to have convinced him and made him condemn himself.

Here it is that Elihu stands out in vivid contrast. He tells Job the truth; but he lays no heavy hand upon him. Elihu has learnt the mighty mysterious power of "the still small voice" — the soul-subduing, heart-melting virtue of grace. Job had given utterance to a quantity of false notions about himself, and those notions had sprouted from a root to which the sharp axe of "truth" had to be applied. "Surely," says Elihu, "thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me.

What words for any poor sinful mortal to utter! Surely, though "the true light" in which we may walk had not shone on the soul of this patriarch, we may well marvel at such language. And yet, mark what follows. Although he was so clean, so innocent, so free from

iniquity, he nevertheless says of God that, "He findeth occasions, he counteth me for His enemy. He putteth my feet in the stocks, He marketh all my paths." Here is a palpable discrepancy. How could a holy, just, and righteous Being count a pure and innocent man His enemy? Impossible. Either Job was self-deceived, or God was unrighteous; and Elihu, as the minister of truth, is not long in pronouncing a judgment, and telling us which is which. "Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man." What a simple truth! And yet how little understood! If God is greater than man, then, obviously, He, and not man, must be the Judge of what is right. This the infidel heart refuses; and hence the constant tendency to sit in judgment upon the works and ways and word of God — upon God Himself. Man, in his impious and infidel folly, undertakes to pronounce judgment upon what is and what is not worthy of God; to decide upon what God ought and what He ought not to say and to do. He proves himself utterly ignorant of that most simple, obvious, necessary truth, that "God is greater than man."

Now, it is when the heart bows under the weight of this great moral truth, that we are in a fit attitude to understand the object of God's dealings with us. Assuredly He must have the upper hand. "Why dost thou strive against him? for He giveth not account of any of His matters. For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, *that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.*"

The real secret of all Job's false reasoning is to be found in the fact that he did not understand the character of God, or the object of all His dealings. He did not see that God was trying him, that He was behind the scenes and using various agents for the accomplishment of His wise and gracious ends. Even Satan himself was a mere instrument in the hand of God; nor could he move the breadth of a hair beyond the divinely prescribed limit; and moreover, when he had executed his appointed business, he was

dismissed, and we hear no more about him. God was dealing with Job. He was trying him in order that He might instruct him, withdraw him from his purpose, and hide pride from him. Had Job seized this grand point, it would have saved him a world of strife and contention. Instead of getting angry with people and things, with individuals and influences, he would have judged himself and bowed low before the Lord in meekness and brokenness and true contrition.

This is immensely important for us all. We are all of us prone to forget the weighty fact that "God trieth the righteous." "He withdraweth not His eyes from them." We are in His hands, and under His eye continually We are the objects of His deep, tender, and unchanging love; but we are also the subjects of His wise moral government. His dealings with us are varied. They are sometimes preventive; sometimes corrective; always instructive. We may be bent on some course of our own, the end of which would be moral ruin. He intervenes and withdraws us from our purpose. He dashes into fragments our air-built castles, dissipates our golden dreams, and interrupts many a darling scheme on which our hearts were bent, and which would have proved to be certain destruction "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, *to be enlightened with the light of the living.*"

If the reader will turn for a moment to Hebrews 12:3-12, he will find much precious instruction on the subject of God's dealings with His people. We do not attempt to dwell upon it, but would merely remark that it presents three distinct ways in which we may meet the chastening of our Father's hand. We may "*despise*" it, as though His hand and His voice were not in it; we may "*faint*" under it, as though it were intolerable, and not the precious fruit of His love; or, lastly, we may be; "*exercised* by it," and thus reap, in due time "the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

"Now, if our patriarch had only seized the great fact that God was dealing with him; that He was trying him for his ultimate good; that He was using circumstances, people, the Sabeans, Satan himself, as His instruments; that all his trials, his losses, his bereavements, his sufferings, were but God's marvellous agency in bringing about His wise and gracious end; that

He would assuredly perfect that which concerned His dear and much-loved servant, because His mercy endureth for ever; in a word, had Job only lost sight of all second causes, and fixed his thoughts upon the living God alone, and accepted all from His loving hand, he would have more speedily reached the Divine solution of all his difficulties.

But it is precisely here that we are all apt to break down. We get occupied with men and things; we view them in reference to ourselves. We do not walk with God through, or rather above, the circumstances; but, on the contrary, we allow the circumstances to get power over us. In place of keeping God between us and our circumstances, we permit these latter to get between us and God. Thus we lose the sense of His presence, the light of His countenance, the holy calmness of being in His loving hand, and under His fatherly eye. We become fretful, impatient, irritable, fault-finding. We get far away from God, out of communion, thoroughly astray, judging every one except ourselves, until at length God takes us in hand, and by His own direct and powerful ministry, brings us back to Himself in true brokenness of heart and humbleness of mind. This is "the end of the Lord."

We must, however, draw this paper to a close. Gladly would we expatiate further on Elihu's remarkable ministry; with pleasure and profit could we quote his further appeals to Job's heart and conscience, his pungent arguments, his pointed questions. But we must forbear, and leave the reader to go through the remaining chapters for himself. In so doing, he will find that when Elihu closes his ministry, God Himself begins to deal directly with the soul of His servant (Job 38-41). He appeals to His works in creation as the display of a power and wisdom which ought assuredly to make Job feel his own littleness. We do not attempt to cull passages from one of the most magnificent and sublime sections of the inspired canon. It must be read as a whole. It needs no comment. The human finger could but tarnish its lustre. Its plainness is only equalled by its moral grandeur. All we shall attempt to do is to call attention to the powerful effect produced upon the heart of Job by this the most marvellous ministry surely under which mortal man was ever called to sit — the immediate ministry of the living God Himself.

This effect was threefold. It had reference to God, to himself, and to his friends — the very points on which he was so entirely astray. As to God, Elihu had declared Job's mistake in the following words: "Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end, because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin; he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God.... Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst: My righteousness is more than God's?" But mark the change. Hearken to the breathings of a truly repentant spirit; the brief yet comprehensive statement of a corrected judgment. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, *but now mine eye seeth Thee*" (Job 42:1-9).

Here, then, was the turning point. All his previous statements as to God and His ways are now pronounced to be "words without knowledge." What a confession! What a moment in a man's history, when he discovers that he has been all wrong! What a thorough breakdown! What profound humiliation! It reminds us of Jacob getting the hollow of his thigh touched, and thus learning his utter weakness and nothingness. These are weighty moments in the history of souls — great epochs which leave an indelible impress on the whole moral being and character. To get right thoughts about God is to begin to get right about everything. If I am wrong about God, I am wrong about myself, wrong about my fellows, wrong about all.

Thus it was with Job. His new thoughts as to God were immediately connected with new thoughts of himself; and hence we find that the elaborate self-vindication, the impassioned egotism, the vehement self-gratulation, the lengthened arguments in self-defence, all is laid aside; all is displaced by one short sentence of three words: "*I am vile.*" And what is to be done with this vile self? Talk

about it? Set it up? Be occupied with it? Take counsel for it? Make provision for it? Nay, "*I abhor it.*"

This is the true moral ground for every one of us. Job took a long time to reach it; and so do we. Many of us imagine that we have reached the end of self when we have given a nominal assent to the doctrine of human depravity, or judged some of those sprouts which have appeared above the surface of our practical life. But, alas! it is to be feared that very few of us indeed really know the full truth about ourselves. It is one thing to say "*We are all vile,*" and quite another to feel, deep down in the heart, that "*I am vile.*" This latter can only be known and habitually realised in the immediate presence of God. The two things must ever go together, "Mine eye seeth *Thee*" — "Wherefore I abhor *myself.*" It is as the light of what God is shines in upon what I am, that I abhor myself. And then my self-abhorrence is a real thing. It is not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. It will be seen in a life of self-abnegation, an humble spirit, a lowly mind, a gracious carriage in the midst of the scene through which I am called to pass. It is of little use to profess very low thoughts of self, while, at the same time, we are quick to resent any injury done to us, any fancied insult, slight, or disparagement. The true secret of a broken and contrite heart is to abide ever in the Divine presence, and then we are able to carry ourselves right toward those with whom we have to do.

Thus we find that when Job got right as to God and himself, he soon got right as to his friends, for he learned to pray for them. Yes, he could pray for the "miserable comforters," the "physicians of no value," the very men with whom he had so long, so stoutly, and so vehemently contended! "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends."

This is morally beautiful. It is perfect. It is the rare and exquisite fruit of Divine workmanship. Nothing can be more touching than to see Job's three friends exchanging their experience, their tradition, and their legality for the precious "burnt-offering;" and to see our dear patriarch exchanging his bitter invectives for the sweet prayer of charity. In short, it is a most soul-subduing scene altogether. The combatants are in the dust before God and in each other's arms. The strife is ended; the war of words is closed; and instead thereof, we

have the tears of repentance, the sweet odour of the burnt-offering, the embrace of love.

Happy scene! Precious fruit of Divine ministry! What remains? What more is needed? What but that the hand of God should lay the top-stone on the beauteous structure? Nor is this lacking, for we read, "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." But how? By what agency? Was it by his own independent industry and clever management? No; all is changed. Job is on new moral ground. He has new thoughts of God, new thoughts of himself, new thoughts of his friends, new thoughts of his circumstances; all things are become new. "Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house; and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; *every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.* So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. ... After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days."

Job 28; Luke 11:34-36

God's Way, and how to find it.

"There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it." What an unspeakable mercy for one who really desires to walk with God, to know that there is a way for him to walk in! God has prepared a pathway for His redeemed in which they may walk with all possible certainty, calmness and fixedness. It is the privilege of every child of God, and every servant of Christ, to be as sure that he is in God's way as that his soul is saved. This may seem a strong statement; but the question is, Is it true? If it be true, it cannot be too strong. No doubt it may, in the judgment of some, savour a little of self-confidence and dogmatism to assert, in such a day as that in which we live, and in the midst of such a scene as that through which we are passing, that we are sure of being in God's path. But what saith the Scripture? It declares "there is a way," and it also tells us how to find and how to walk in that way. Yes; the self-same voice that tells us of God's salvation for our souls, tells us also of God's pathway for our feet; — the very same authority that assures us that "he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life," assures us also that there is a way so plain that "the wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein."

This, we repeat, is a signal mercy — a mercy at all times, but especially in a day of confusion and perplexity like the present. It is deeply affecting to notice the state of uncertainty in which many of God's dear people are found at the present moment. We do not refer now to the question of salvation, of this we have spoken largely elsewhere; but that which we have now before us is the path of the Christian — what he ought to do, where he should be found, how he ought to carry himself in the midst of the professing Church. Is it not too true that multitudes of the Lord's people are at sea as to these things? Are there not many who, were they to tell out the real feelings of their hearts, would have to own themselves in a thoroughly unsettled state — to confess that they know not what to do, or where to go, or what to believe? Now, the question is, Would

God leave His children, would Christ leave His servants, in such darkness and confusion?

No; my dear Lord, in following Thee

And not in dark uncertainty,

This foot obedient moves.

May not a child know the will of his father? May not a servant know the will of his master? And if this be so in our earthly relationships, how much more fully may we count upon it in reference to our Father and Master in Heaven. When Israel of old emerged from the Red Sea, and stood upon the margin of that great and terrible wilderness which lay between them and the land of promise, how were they to know their way? The trackless sand of the desert lay all around them. It was in vain to look for any footprint there. It was a dreary waste in which the vulture's eye could not discern a pathway. Moses felt this when he said to Hobab, "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes" (Num. 10:31). How well our poor unbelieving hearts can understand this touching appeal! How one craves a human guide in the midst of a scene of perplexity! How fondly the heart clings to one whom we deem competent to give us guidance in moments of darkness and difficulty!

And yet, we may ask, what did Moses want with Hobab's eyes? Had not Jehovah graciously undertaken to be their guide? Yes, truly; for we are told that "on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony; and at even, there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed; and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle, they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the

tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the Lord they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the Lord, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed; whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed; or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents and journeyed not, but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed: they kept the charge of the Lord at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses" (Num. 9:15-23).

Here was divine guidance — a guidance, we may surely say, quite sufficient to render them independent of their own eyes, of Hobab's eyes, and the eyes of any other mortal. It is interesting to note that in the opening of the book of Numbers, it was arranged that the ark of the covenant was to find its place in the very bosom of the congregation; but in chapter 10 we are told that when "they departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey, the ark of the covenant of the Lord *went before them*, in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them." Instead of Jehovah finding a resting-place in the bosom of His redeemed people, He becomes their travelling Guide, and goes before them to seek out a resting-place for them. What touching grace is here! and what faithfulness! If Moses will ask Hobab to be their guide, and that, too, in the very face of God's provision — even the cloud and the silver trumpet, then will Jehovah leave His place in the centre of the tribes, and go before them to search them out a resting-place. And did not He know the wilderness well? Would not He be better for them than ten thousand Hobabs? Might they not fully trust Him? Assuredly. He would not lead them astray. If His grace had redeemed them from Egypt's bondage, and conducted them through the Red Sea, surely they might confide in the same grace to guide them across that great and terrible wilderness, and bring them safely into the land flowing with milk and honey.

But it must be borne in mind that, in order to profit by divine guidance, there must be the abandonment of our own will, and of all confidence in our own reasonings, as well as all confidence in the thoughts and reasonings of others. If I have Jehovah as my Guide, I do not want my own eyes or the eyes of a Hobab either. God is sufficient: I can trust Him. He knows all the way across the desert; and hence, if I keep my eye upon Him, I shall be guided aright.

But this leads us on to the second division of our subject, namely, How am I to find God's way? An all-important question, surely. Whither am I to turn to find God's pathway? If the vulture's eye, so keen, so powerful, so far-seeing, hath not seen it — if the young lion, so vigorous in movement, so majestic in mien, hath not trodden it — if man knoweth not the price of it, and if it is not to be found in the land of the living — if the depth saith, It is not in me, and the sea saith, It is not with me — if it cannot be gotten for gold or precious stones — if the wealth of the universe cannot equal it, and no wit of man discover it — then whither am I to turn? where shall I find it?

Shall I turn to those great standards of orthodoxy which rule the religious thought and feeling of millions throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church? Is this wondrous pathway of wisdom to be found with them? Do they form any exception to the great, broad, sweeping rule of Job 28? Assuredly not.

What, then, am I to do? I know there is a way. God, who cannot lie, declares this, and I believe it; but where am I to find it? "Whence, then, cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and Death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears." Does it not seem like a hopeless case for any poor ignorant mortal to search for this wondrous pathway? No, blessed be God, it is by no means a hopeless case, for "He understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. For He looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and He weigheth the waters by measure. When He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then did He see it and *declare* it; He prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And

unto man He said, 'Behold, *the fear of the Lord*, that is wisdom; and *to depart from evil* is understanding.' "

Here, then, is the divine secret of wisdom: "The fear of the Lord." This sets the conscience directly in the presence of God, which is its only true place. The object of Satan is to keep the conscience out of this place — to bring it under the power and authority of man — to lead it into subjection to the commandments and doctrines of men — to thrust in something between the conscience and the authority of Christ the Lord, it matters not what it is; it may be a creed or a confession containing a quantity of truth — it may be the opinion of a man or a set of men — the judgment of some favourite teacher — anything, in short, to come in and usurp, in the heart, the place which belongs to God's Word alone. This is a terrible snare, and a stumbling-block — a most serious hindrance to our progress in the ways of the Lord. God's Word must rule me — God's pure and simple Word, not man's interpretation thereof. No doubt, God may use a man to unfold that Word to my soul; but then it is not man's unfolding of God's Word that rules me, but God's Word by man unfolded. This is of all importance.

We must be exclusively taught and exclusively governed by the Word of the living God. Nothing else will keep us straight, or give solidity and consistency to our character and course as Christians. There is a strong tendency within and around us to be ruled by the thoughts and opinions of men — by those great standards of doctrine which men have set up.

Those standards and opinions may have a large amount of truth in them — they may be all true so far as they go; that is not the point in question now. What we want to impress upon the Christian reader is, that he is not to be governed by the thoughts of his fellow-man, but simply and solely by the Word of God. It is of no value to hold a truth from man; I must hold it directly from God Himself. God may use a man to communicate His truth; but unless I hold it as from God, it has no divine power over my heart and conscience; it does not bring me into living contact with God, but actually hinders that contact by bringing in something between my soul and His holy authority.

We should greatly like to enlarge upon and enforce this great principle; but we must forbear, just now, in order to unfold to the reader one or two solemn and practical points set forth in the eleventh chapter of Luke, points which, if entered into, will enable us to understand a little better how to find God's way. We shall quote the passage at length. "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light."

Here, then, we are furnished with the true secret of discerning God's way. It may seem very difficult, in the midst of the troubled sea of Christendom to steer one's course aright. So many conflicting voices fall on the ear. So many opposing views solicit our attention, men of God differ so in judgment, shades of opinion are so multiplied, that it seems impossible to reach a sound conclusion. We go to one man who, so far as we can judge, seems to have a single eye, and he tells us one thing; we go to another man who also seems to have a single eye, and he tells the very reverse. What, then, are we to think?

Well, one thing is certain, that our own eye is not single when we are running, in uncertainty and perplexity, from one man to another. The single eye is fixed on Christ alone, and thus the body is filled with light. The Israelite of old had not to run hither and thither to consult with his fellow as to the right way. Each had the same divine guide, namely, the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. In a word, Jehovah Himself was the infallible Guide of each member of the congregation. They were not left to the guidance of the most intelligent, sagacious, or experienced man in the assembly; neither were they left to follow their own way; each was to follow the Lord. The silver trumpet announced to all alike the mind of God; and no one whose ear was open and attentive was left at any loss. The eye and the ear of each were to be directed to God *alone*, and not to a fellow-mortal. This was the secret of guidance in the trackless desert of old, and this is the secret of guidance in the

vast moral wilderness through which God's redeemed are passing now. One man may say, Listen to me; and another may say, Listen to me; and a third may say, Let each one take his own way. The obedient heart says, in opposition to all, I must follow my Lord.

This makes all so simple. It will not, by any means, tend to foster a spirit of haughty independence; quite the reverse. The more I am taught to lean on God alone for guidance, the more I shall distrust and look off from myself; and this, assuredly, is not independence. True, it will deliver me from servile following of any man, but giving me to feel my responsibility to Christ alone; but this is precisely what is so much needed at the present moment. The more closely we examine the elements that are abroad in the professing Church, the more we shall be convinced of our personal need of this entire subjection to divine authority, which is only another name for "the fear of the Lord," or, "a single eye."

There is one brief sentence, in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles, which furnishes a perfect antidote to the self-will and the servile fear of man so rife around us, and that is, "We must obey God." What an utterance! "We must *obey*." This is the cure for self-will. "We must obey God." This is the cure for servile subjection to the commandments and doctrines of men. There must be obedience; but obedience to what? To God's authority, and to that alone. Thus the soul is preserved from the influence of infidelity on the one hand, and superstition on the other. Infidelity says, Do as you like. Superstition says, Do as man tells you. Faith says, "We must obey God."

Here is the holy balance of the soul in the midst of the conflicting and confounding influences around us in this our day. As a servant, I am to obey my Lord; as a child, I am to hearken to my Father's commandments. Nor am I the less to do this although my fellow-servants and my brethren may not understand me. I must remember that the immediate business of my soul is with God Himself.

He before whom the elders bow,

With Him is *all* my business now.

It is my privilege to be as sure that I have my Master's mind as to my path as that I have His Word for the security of my soul. If not, where am I? Is it not my privilege to have a single eye? Yes, surely. And what then? "A body full of light." Now, if my body is full of light, can my mind be full of perplexity? Impossible. The two things are wholly incompatible; and hence, when one is plunged "in dark uncertainty," it is very plain his eye is not single. He may seem very sincere, he may be very anxious to be guided aright; but he may rest assured there is the lack of a single eye — that indispensable prerequisite to divine guidance. The Word is plain, "If thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light."

God will ever guide the obedient, humble soul; but, on the other hand, if we do not walk according to the light communicated, we shall get into darkness. Light not acted upon becomes darkness, and oh, "how great is that darkness"! Nothing is more dangerous than tampering with the light which God gives. it must, sooner or later, lead to the most disastrous consequences. "Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness." "Hear, ye, and give ear: be not proud; for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before *He* cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness" (Jer. 13:15-16).

This is deeply solemn. What a contrast between a man having a single eye, and a man not acting on the light which God has given him! The one has his body full of light; the other has his body full of darkness: the one has no part dark; the other is plunged in gross darkness: the one is a light-bearer for others; the other is a stumbling-block in the way. We know nothing more solemn than the judicial acting of God, in actually turning our light into darkness, because we have refused to act on the light which He has been pleased to impart.

Christian reader, art thou acting up to thy light? Has God sent a ray of light into thy soul? Has He shown thee something wrong in thy ways or associations? Art thou persisting in any line of action which conscience tells thee is not in full accordance with thy Master's will? Search and see. "Give glory to the Lord thy God." Act

on the light. Do not hesitate. Think not of consequences. Obey, we beseech thee, the Word of thy Lord. This very moment, as thine eye scans these lines, let the purpose of thy soul be to depart from iniquity wherever thou findest it. Say not, Whither shall I go? What shall I do next? There is evil everywhere. It is only escaping from one evil to plunge into another. Say not these things; do not argue or reason; do not look at results; think not of what the world or the world-church will say of thee; rise above all these things, and tread the path of light — that path which shineth more and more unto the perfect day of glory.

Remember, God never gives light for two steps at a time. If He has given thee light for one step, then, in the fear and love of His Name, take that one step, and thou wilt assuredly get more light — yes, "more and more." But if there be the refusal to act, the light which is in thee will become gross darkness, thy feet will stumble on the dark mountains of error which lie on either side of the straight and narrow path of obedience; and thou wilt become a stumbling-block in the path of others.

Some of the most grievous stumbling-blocks that lie, at this moment, in the pathway of anxious inquirers are found in the persons of those who once seemed to possess the truth, but have turned from it. The light which was in them has become darkness, and oh, how great and how appalling is that darkness! How sad it is to see those who ought to be light-bearers, acting as a positive hindrance to young and earnest Christians! But let not young Christians be hindered by them. The way is plain. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Let each one hear and obey for himself the voice of the Lord. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." The Lord be praised for this precious Word! It puts each one in the place of direct responsibility to Christ Himself; it tells us plainly what is *God's way*, and, just as plainly, *how to find it*.

Psalm 39: 7

“WHAT WAIT I FOR?”

This is a searching question for the heart, but it is oftentimes a most necessary one, inasmuch as we may constantly detect ourselves in an attitude of waiting for things which, when they come, prove not to be worth waiting for.

The human heart is very much like the poor lame man at the gate of the temple in Acts 3. He was looking at every passerby “expecting to receive something.” And the heart will ever be looking out for some relief, some comfort or some enjoyment in passing circumstances. It may be found sitting by the side of some creature-stream, vainly expecting some refreshment to flow along its channel.

It is amazing to think of the trifles on which nature will fix its expectant gaze — a change of circumstances, change of scene, a journey, a visit, a letter, a book. Anything is sufficient to raise expectations in a poor heart which is not finding its center, its spring, its all, in Christ.

Hence the practical importance of frequently turning sharp round upon the heart with the question, “What wait I for?” Doubtless, the true answer to this enquiry would at times furnish the most advanced Christian with matter for deep humiliation and self-judgment before the Lord.

In Psalm 39: 6 we have three great types of character as set forth in the “vain show,” “vain disquietude” and “heaping up.” These types may sometimes be found combined, but very often they have a distinct development.

There are many whose whole life is one “vain show,” whether in their personal character, their commercial position, their political or religious profession. There is nothing solid about them, nothing real, nothing true. The glitter is the most shallow gilding possible. There is nothing deep, nothing intrinsic. All is surface work — all the merest flash and smoke.

Then we find another class whose life is one continued scene of “vain disquietude.” You will never find them at ease — never satisfied, never happy. There is always some terrible thing coming — some catastrophe in the distance, the mere anticipation of which keeps them in a constant fever of anxiety. They are troubled about property, about friends, about trade, about children, about servants. Though placed in circumstances which thousands of their fellow-creatures would deem most enviable, they seem to be in a perpetual fret. They harass themselves in reference to troubles that may never come, difficulties they may never encounter, sorrows they may never live to see. Instead of remembering the blessings of the past and rejoicing in the mercies of the present, they are anticipating the trials and sorrows of the future. In a word, “*they are disquieted in vain.*”

Finally, you will meet another class, quite different from either of the preceding — keen, shrewd, industrious, money-making people who would live where others would starve. There is not much “vain show” about them. They are too solid, and life is too practical a reality for anything of that sort. Neither can you say there is much disquietude about them. Theirs is an easy-going, quiet, plodding spirit, or an active, enterprising, speculating turn of mind. “They heap up, and know not who shall gather.”

But remember, on all three alike the Spirit has stamped “*vanity.*” Yes, “all” without any exception, “under the sun,” has been pronounced by one who knew it by experience and wrote it by inspiration, “*vanity and vexation of spirit.*” Turn where you will “under the sun” and you will not find anything on which the heart can rest. You must rise on the steady and vigorous pinion of faith to regions “above the sun,” to find “a better and an enduring substance.” The One who sits at the right hand of God has said, “I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause them that love Me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures” (Prov. 8: 20-21). None but Jesus can give “substance.” None but He can “fill.” None but He can “satisfy.” There is that in Christ's perfect work which meets the deepest need of conscience. There is that in His glorious Person which can satisfy the most earnest longings of the heart. The one who has found Christ

on the cross and Christ on the throne, has found all he can possibly need for time or eternity.

Well might the psalmist, having challenged his heart with the question, "What wait I for?" reply, "My hope is in Thee." No "vain show," no "vain disquietude," no "heaping up" for him. He had found an object in God worth waiting for. Therefore, turning away his eye from all beside, he says, "My hope is in Thee."

This, my beloved reader, is the only true, peaceful and happy position. The soul that leans on, looks to, and waits for Jesus will never be disappointed. Such an one possesses an exhaustless fund of present enjoyment in fellowship with Christ. At the same time he is cheered by "that blessed hope" that when this present scene, with all its "vain show," its "vain disquietude" and its vain resources shall have passed away, he shall be with Jesus where He is, to behold His glory, to bask in the light of His countenance and to be conformed to His image forever.

May we, then, be much in the habit of challenging our earth-bound, creatures-seeking hearts with the searching enquiry, "What wait I for?" Am I waiting for some change of circumstances or "for the Son from heaven?" Can I look up to Jesus and with a full and an honest heart, say, "Lord, my hope is in Thee?"

May we be more thoroughly separated from this present evil world and all that pertains thereto, by the power of communion with those things that are unseen and eternal.

"From various cares my heart retires,

Though deep and boundless its desires,

I'm now to please but One;

He before whom the elders bow,

With Him is all my business now,

And with the souls that are His own.

“With these my happy lot is cast,
Through the world's deserts rude and waste,
Or through its gardens fair;
Whether the storms of trouble sweep,
Or all in dead supineness sleep,
Still to go on be my whole care.”

Psalm 67.

Israel and the Nations.

It would greatly tend to give clearness and definiteness to missionary effort to keep fully before our minds God's original purpose in sending the gospel to the Gentiles, or nations. This we have stated in the most distinct manner in Acts 15. "Simeon hath declared," says James, "how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, *to take out of them* a people for His name."

It gives no warrant for the idea, so persistently held by the professing Church, that the whole world is to be converted by the preaching of the gospel. To convert the world is one thing; to take out of the nations a people is quite another.

The latter, and not the former, is God's present work. It is what He has been doing since the day that Simon Peter opened the kingdom of heaven to the Gentile in Acts 10; and it is what He will continue to do until the moment so rapidly approaching, in which the last elect one is gathered out, and our Lord shall come to receive His people unto Himself.

Let all missionaries remember this. They may rest assured it will not clip their wings, or cripple their energies; it will only guide their movements, by giving them a divine aim and object. Of what possible use can it be for a man to propose as the end of his labours something wholly different from that which is before the mind of God? Ought not a servant to seek to do his master's will? Can he expect to please his master by pursuing other than his clearly expressed object?

It is blessedly true, that all the earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. There is no question as to this. All Scripture bears witness to it. To quote the passages would literally fill a volume. All Christians are agreed on this point, and hence there is no need to adduce evidence.

But the question is, how is this grand and glorious result to be brought about? Is it the purpose of God to use the professing Church

as His agent, or a preached gospel as His instrument, in the conversion of the world? Scripture says No; with a clearness which ought to sweep away every doubt.

Here let it be distinctly understood that we delight in all true missionary effort. We heartily wish God's speed to every true missionary — to every one who has left home, and kindred, and friends, and all the comforts and privileges of civilized life, in order to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the dark places of the earth. We desire to render hearty thanks to God for all that has been accomplished in the fields of foreign missions; though we cannot approve some modes by which the work is carried on. We consider there is a lack of simple faith in God, and of subjection to the authority of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. There is too much of human machinery, and looking to the world for aid.

But all this is not our present object. The point with which we are occupied in this brief paper is this — *will* God make use of the professing Church to convert the nations? We ask not, *has* He done so? for, were we to put the question thus, we could only receive an unqualified negative; for the professing Church has been at work for eighteen long centuries; and what is the result?

Let the reader take a glance at a missionary map, and he will see in a moment. Look at those large patches of black, designed to set forth the dismal regions over which heathenism bears sway. Look at the red, the green, the yellow, setting forth popery, the Greek church, and Mohammedanism. And where is — we say not true Christianity, but even nominal Protestantism? That is indicated by those spots of blue which, if all put together, make but a small fraction indeed. As to what even this Protestantism is we need not now stop to inquire.

What, then, say the Scriptures on the great question of the conversion of the nations? Take, for example, the lovely psalm that stands at the head of this paper. It is but one proof among a thousand, but, we need hardly say, perfectly harmonizes with the testimony of all Scripture. We give it in full.

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy: for Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. *God shall bless us:* and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."

Here, then, the simple truth shines before us. It is when God shall have mercy upon Israel — when He shall cause His light to shine upon Zion — then will His way be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. It is through *Israel*, not through the professing Church, that God will yet bless the nations.

That the "us" of the foregoing psalm refers to Israel, no intelligent reader of Scripture needs to be told. Indeed, as we all know, the great burden of the Psalms, the Prophets, and the entire Old Testament, is Israel. There is not a syllable about the Church in the Old Testament. Types and shadows there are in which — now that we have the light of the New Testament — we can see the truth of the Church prefigured. But without that light no one could, by any possibility, find the truth of the Church in Old Testament Scripture. That great mystery was, as the inspired apostle tells us, "*hid*" — not in the Scriptures (for whatever is contained in the Scriptures is no longer hid, but revealed) but it was "*hid in God*;" and was not, and could not, be revealed until Christ, being rejected by Israel, was crucified and raised from the dead.

So long as the testimony to Israel was pending, the doctrine of the Church could not be unfolded. Hence, although at the day of Pentecost we have the *beginning of the Church*, yet it was not until Israel had rejected the testimony of the Holy Ghost in Stephen that a special witness was called out in the person of Paul, to whom *the doctrine of the Church* was committed. We must distinguish between the fact and the doctrine; indeed it is not until we reach the last chapter of the Acts that the curtain finally drops upon Israel; and Paul, the prisoner at Rome, fully unfolds the grand mystery of the Church which from ages and generations had been hid in God, but

was now made manifest. Let the reader ponder Romans 16: 25-26; Ephesians 3: 1-11; Colossians 1: 24-27.

We cannot attempt to go fully into this glorious subject here; indeed, to refer to it at all is a digression from our present line. But we deem it needful just to say thus much, in order that the reader may fully see that Psalm 67 refers to Israel; and, seeing this, the whole truth will flow into his soul, that the conversion of the nations stands connected with Israel, and not with the Church. It is through Israel, and not through the Church, that God will yet bless the nations. It is His eternal purpose that the seed of Abraham, His friend, shall yet be pre-eminent in the earth, and that all nations shall be blessed in and through them. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, *out of all languages of the nations*, even shall take hold of *the skirt of him that is a Jew*, saying, We will go *with you*; for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8: 23).

It would be an easy and a delightful task to prove from the New Testament, that, previous to the restoration and blessing of Israel, and therefore previous to the conversion of the nations, the true Church of God, the body of Christ, shall have been taken up to be for ever with the Lord, in the full and ineffable communion of the Father's house; so that the Church will not be God's agency in the conversion of the Jews as a nation, any more than in that of the Gentiles. But we do not desire at this time to do more than establish the two points above stated.

Psalm 93; 1 Corinthians 3: 16; 1 Corinthians 6: 19

"There is one body"

These scriptures set forth a truth which I believe to be of cardinal importance to every one of us, individually as well as corporately: the Church as a whole is the temple of God; and every believer is made such as really, as literally, as absolutely as the temple of old in which God dwelt, only, of course, in a different way. He dwells in each individual believer. Mark that fact; ponder it. It is not a question of opinion; it is God's truth. If people do not bow to Scripture, it is of no use to argue with them.

The truth presented here is not one about which you may think this or that. *God has a house here on the earth.* Take in that fact beloved; ponder it. Do not say it is what we *ought* to be, but what we *are*; and then see the conduct that flows from it; see what becomes God's house: "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."

This is the basis of the truth which underlies all discipline from the time that God had a house on earth. We never hear a word about God dwelling with man until redemption is accomplished. But the moment that Israel is out of Egypt, on the shore of the Red Sea, the first note that falls on our ear from the lips of a redeemed people is: "I will prepare Him a habitation." And the moment the last pin is put into the earthly tabernacle, the glory of God comes down to take up His abode in the midst of His people.

But His presence demands and secures holiness. Read Joshua 6 & Joshua 7, and see how we get there two grand consequences of the self-same presence: Jericho in ruins, and the heap of stones in the valley of Achor. One man dared to defile the assembly of God! How solemn it is! It was a fine thing to see those bulwarks crumbling to dust beneath the feet of God's people. But mark: the same presence that laid Jericho in ruins could not allow that one man's sin to escape notice. The Holy Ghost has penned these records for us, and it is our bounden duty to hang over them; and to seek to drink into our souls the instruction in them.

The very instincts of faith ought to have taught Joshua that there was some hindrance. God's people were His habitation. That fact gave them a characteristic which marked them off from every other nation upon earth. No other nation knew aught of that great privilege but Israel. But God is God; He will be true to Himself; He will take care of His great name. Joshua thought the glory of that great name was involved: but there are more ways than one to maintain that glory.

If Jehovah is present to give victory over His enemies, He is also present to discipline His people. "Israel hath sinned!" God does not say, One man has sinned — find him out. No; it is the six hundred thousand of Israel, because Israel is one nation; one Divine Presence in their midst stamped and marked and formed their unity. Do not try to reason about it, brethren, but bow down your whole moral being to that truth. Do not judge it, but let it judge you. "Israel hath sinned;" that is the reason why they could not get the victory. And Israel must come up man by man, so that he who has transgressed the covenant of Jehovah may be taken. God cannot go on with unjudged evil. Weakness is no hindrance, wickedness is. Can God lend the sanction of His presence to evil? Never! If we are God's dwelling-place, we must be holy. This is one of those eternal principles which can never be given up.

But the question is raised: How could it be said that Israel had sinned? Six hundred thousand innocent people! The answer is, *the nation is one*, and that unity has to be maintained and confessed.

In Leviticus 24 we read, that twelve loaves were placed on the golden table before the Lord continually, with the seven lamps of the golden candlestick to throw their light upon them. The end of the same chapter shows us a man brought outside the camp, where all Israel is to stone him with stones. Why this grouping of passages? It is full of meaning. The grouping of Scripture is among some of its brightest glories; the very way in which the Holy Ghost groups His materials commands our attention. Every fact, every circumstance tends to illustrate its infinite depths and its moral glories.

Why, then, do we find this connection in Leviticus? For the simple purpose of illustrating this great principle: faith's power to

grasp the eternal truth of Israel's unity, and to confess it in the face of everything — a magnificent, practical truth. There is first the divine side: what Israel was in God's mind; and then, what Israel might become under God's discipline. And it ever behoves the faithful company to confess and maintain the original truth of God, even in the midst of the ruin around. I earnestly, urgently press the necessity as from God today, to maintain the great truth of the unity of the body of Christ as that which we have to hold, maintain, and confess in the face of everything.

Elijah on mount Carmel, when the kingdom was divided, called for twelve stones with which to build the altar. But Israel is no longer twelve tribes, it might be said; Israel's unity is broken and gone. No; it is an indissoluble unity, a unity which is never to be surrendered. Israel is twelve while God's eye rests on the twelve loaves on the golden table, on the twelve stones in Aaron's breast-plate. Faith holds fast that truth, and Elijah builds his altar of twelve stones. The unity is never to be given up, though it may be like a chain flung across a river, with the tide flowing over it, so that you cannot see it. The Church was one on the day of Pentecost; it will be one in the glory; and it is as true to day that there is one body and one Spirit, as it was when the Holy Ghost penned the fourth of Ephesians. How is this unity formed? By the Holy Ghost; it is union with the Man at the right hand of God.

Thus I get three substantial reasons for a life of holiness: I am not to dishonour Him to whom I am united; I am not to grieve the Spirit by whom I am united; and I am not to grieve the members to whom I am united.

I feel responsibility to urge this truth upon you. Let not the devil cheat you of the blessing of walking in it. See that you realize its formative, influential power. Think how your state and walk at this moment are affecting the saints elsewhere. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." All Israel was affected by Achan's sin. He thought nobody saw, nobody knew, and quietly hid the forbidden thing in his tent. If this is your state, there is a complete stoppage at once: there is no more power put forth on your behalf by God; there is power truly, but power not to act for you in

victory, but to act towards you in discipline; power to smash you to pieces.

Let us not measure the Word of God by our consciences, or by our sensibilities, but in simplicity believe what it says. We read that there is one Spirit uniting every member to the Head in glory, and uniting every single member on the earth to every other. In this body a saint out of communion is like a waster in a candle; he affects his fellow-saints. Confess this great truth, own it simply, whatever the condition. Never deny it, never give it up. You say, Brethren are smashed up! I answer, I am not to be occupied with brethren, but with the truth of God. Take your eyes off brethren, and fix them on the truth of God. Are you conscientiously gathered on the ground of the one body? I speak freely and pointedly to you, because I believe this truth is assailed. In 1848 the Head was assailed — the Person of Christ. In 1882 I feel that the truth of the one body is assailed. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and is joined to all who belong to Him. There is no such thing as independence in the Word of God. The assembly in one place is the corporate local expression of the Church of God, as we saw of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament.

This truth, like a golden thread, shines from cover to cover in the Book of God, and is always known to faith. Why did Daniel pray towards Jerusalem? The house of God was not there to the eye of man; but it was there to faith. Faith still recognising it prays towards it, though the lions' den be its reward.

Again, when Paul was before Agrippa, the nation scattered among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other, but Paul will speak of "the promise unto which our twelve tribes hope to come:" and the noun is in the singular (*dodecaphulon*). Could Paul have *shown* them?

And are you going to give up the unity of the Church of God? Are you going to have to do with things got up by the devil to cast dust in the eyes of Gods saints, and to hide from the mind the everlasting supreme truth of the one body? Is the body of Christ a little society based upon certain principles? How can you talk "joining" anything? If you are converted to Christ, all the "joining"

is done! you are "added to the Lord;" you are part of that which man cannot touch for a moment; no one can cut off one single member of the body of Christ, which, according to the eternal purpose of God, and according to the operation of the Holy Ghost, is united to Him.

There is no need to organise this body. No, thank God, it is not man's work at all. The Holy Ghost came down at Pentecost to form it, and here it is still. And when our Lord Jesus comes to take it to the glory, it will be "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," in which He will show forth "the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Psalm 93:5

The Discipline of the Assembly

— its Ground, Nature, and Object.

"Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh Thy House, O Lord, for ever" Ps. 93: 5.

Here we have, plainly set before us, the real ground of discipline in the assembly. The place of God's presence must be holy: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." It is not upon the miserable principle of "stand by thyself, I am holier than thou." No, thank God, it is not this. It is not upon the ground of what we are, but what God is, that discipline is exercised. To allow unjudged evil, either in doctrine or practice, in the assembly, is tantamount to saying that God and evil can go on together — which is simply wickedness of the highest and most daring character.

But some persons maintain that we are not to judge, and Matthew 7: 1 is quoted in proof. We reply that the passage has nothing to say to the assembly: it simply teaches us, as individuals, not to judge motives. Further on in the chapter, we are told to beware of false prophets. How can we beware, if we are not to judge? "By their fruits ye shall know them." So that, even as individuals, we are to judge conduct. We are not to judge motives but fruits. In 1 Corinthians 5, the assembly is peremptorily called to judge and put away an evil doer.

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." And then, at the end of the chapter, we read: "Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

This is clear and conclusive. The assembly is solemnly bound to exercise discipline — bound to judge and put away evil-doers. To

refuse to do so is to become a leavened lump; and, most assuredly, God and unjudged leaven cannot go on together.

Mark, we speak of *unjudged* leaven. We know, alas, that there is evil in every member of the assembly; but if it is judged and refused, it does not defile the assembly, or hinder the enjoyment of the Divine Presence. It was not the evil in the man's nature that caused him to be put away, but the evil in his life. If he had judged and refused the sin in his nature, the assembly would not have been called to judge and refuse him. All this is as simple as it is solemn. An assembly that refuses to judge evil, in doctrine or morals, is not an assembly of God. There may be children of God in it, but they are in a false and dangerous position; and if the assembly persists in refusing to judge the evil, they should, with firm decision, turn away from it. They are solemnly called upon to do so: "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

But there are many who do not understand the truth as to the assembly, or its discipline, and they bring forward Matthew 13: 30 as a proof that evil-doers are not to be put away from the assembly, or the Lord's table. The tares and the wheat are to grow together until the harvest, they say. Yes; but where? In the assembly? Nay; but in the field, and "the field is the *world*" — not the Church. To argue that, because the tares and wheat are to grow together in the world, therefore evildoers are to be knowingly allowed in the assembly, is to place the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Matthew 13, in direct opposition to the teaching of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 5. Hence, this argument cannot stand for a moment, but must be flung to the winds. To confound the kingdom of Heaven, in the Gospel of Matthew, with the Church of God, in the Epistles of Paul, is to mar the integrity of the truth of God, and plunge the Lord's people into utter confusion. Indeed, no human language could adequately set forth the deplorable consequences of such a system of teaching. But this is a digression from our subject, to which we must return.

Having proved from the plainest statements of Holy Scripture that the assembly is solemnly bound to judge those that are within, and put away evil-doers, we shall now proceed to consider the nature, character, and spirit of the discipline which the assembly is

called to exercise. Nothing can be more solemn or more affecting than the act of putting away a person from the Lord's table. It is the last sad and unavoidable act of the whole assembly, and it should be performed with broken hearts and weeping eyes. Alas, how often it is otherwise! How often does this most solemn and holy duty take the form of a mere official announcement that such a person is out of fellowship. Need we wonder that discipline, so carried out, fails to tell with power upon the erring one, or upon the assembly?

How then should the discipline be carried out? Just as 1 Corinthians 5 directs. When the case is so patent, so clear, that all discussion and deliberation is at an end, the whole assembly should be solemnly convened for the special purpose — for, most assuredly it is of sufficient gravity and importance to command a special meeting. All should, if possible, attend, and seek grace to make the sin their own, to go down before God in true self-judgement, and eat the sin offering. The assembly is not called to deliberate or discuss. If there is any demand for discussion, the assembly is not called to act. The case should be thoroughly investigated, and all the facts collected by those who care for the interests of Christ and His Church; and when it is thoroughly settled, and the evidence perfectly conclusive, then the whole assembly is called to perform, in deep sorrow and humiliation, the sad act of putting away from among themselves the evil-doer. It is an act of holy obedience to the Lord's command.

We cannot but feel that, were the assembly's discipline carried out in this spirit, we should see very different results. How different is this from the formal reading out of a notice in the course, or at the close, of an ordinary meeting — a notice often unheard by many. It is an entirely different thing, and it would be attended with very different results, both as to the assembly and the person put away. There would be a much more profound sense, on all hands, of the gravity and solemnity of the assembly's discipline. And oh, what urgent need there is of this in all our assemblies! We are sadly prone to be light and trifling.

We would repeat, and emphasise the statement, that the putting away of a person from the Lord's table, as well as the reception, must be the act of the whole assembly. No one has any

right to tell another to remain away from the table. If I know of any brother who is living in sin, I should seek to exercise his conscience in a pastoral way. I should warn him, and seek to lead him to self-judgement. If he persists, I should bring his case before those who really care for the honour of Christ and the purity of His assembly. Then, if there be no hope, and no possible ground for demur, the assembly should be called together to act, and the occasion might be used for setting before the consciences of all the solemnity of the ground occupied by the assembly, and the holiness that becometh the house of the Lord forever.

We cannot too strongly protest against the idea of the whole assembly being called to discuss cases of discipline. We may well say, "Doth not even nature itself teach" the unseemliness of bringing the details of a case of immorality, for example, before a promiscuous assembly? It is contrary to God and contrary to nature.

In conclusion, one word as to the object of the assembly's discipline. The inspired apostle tells us, in 1 Cor. 5, that it is salvation — "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This is very precious. It is worthy of the God of all grace. The man is delivered to Satan for the destruction of that odious thing which has caused his humiliating fall, *that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*.

Let us never forget this. We should ever be on the lookout for this precious result when any one has to be put away. We should wait much on the Lord to own the action of the assembly in this way. We should not put away evil-doers in order to get rid of a disgrace or a trouble to us, but to maintain the holiness of the Lord's house, and for the ultimate salvation of those put away.

And here we may remark that the discipline of the assembly can never interfere with the unity of the body. Some persons speak of cutting off the members of the body of Christ, when any are refused or put away by the assembly. This is a grave mistake. The man in 1 Cor. 5 was a member of the body, and nothing could touch that blessed membership. He was put away, not because he was unconverted, but because he defiled the assembly. But the discipline was used for the ultimate blessing of a member of the body. No

member of the body can ever be cut off. All are indissolubly joined to the Head in Heaven, and to the members on earth, by the Holy Ghost. "By one Spirit we are all baptised into one body."

This is divinely simple and clear, and moreover it is a conclusive answer to the statement so constantly made, namely, that, provided a person is a Christian, he ought not to be put away or refused by the assembly. No such question is ever raised. To put away a person for not being a Christian is opposed to the spirit and teaching of the Word of God. Even under the Old Testament economy people were not put outside the camp for not being the seed of Abraham, or circumcised members of the congregation, but because they were ceremonially defiled. See Num. 5.

But we must close this paper with a brief reply to a question often raised, namely this. Has any assembly, now, power to deliver a person to Satan? This question is distinctly answered by the far seeing wisdom of the Holy Ghost in 1 Cor 5. For, as if anticipating it, He sums up His teaching at the close of the chapter, not by repeating the command to deliver such an one to Satan, but by adding another; Wherefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

This is most striking, lest any should raise an objection on the score of power, the Holy Ghost gives us distinctly to understand, that is not a question of *power*, but *obedience*.

P.S. There is a character of discipline presented in 2 Thess. 3 which demands our serious attention: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye *withdraw yourselves* from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.... If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

This is what we may call personal discipline in private life — a very important thing, much needed, alas, but not generally understood. It is not a case calling for the action of the assembly, but for faithful personal dealing. The disorderly walking referred to is a

brother not working, but going about as an idle busybody. Such a one was to be admonished, and avoided. Now we cannot help thinking that this form of discipline is much called for. There are many whose ways, though not of such a character as to call for excommunication, do, nevertheless, demand faithful dealing: for example, persons going in debt, living beyond their means, dressing in a vain, fashionable style, unbecoming a Christian; and many other things inconsistent with the holiness, purity and solemnity of the Lord's table and the assembly. If all such cases were dealt with according to the apostolic command in 2 Thess. 3, we believe it would prove a real blessing to many.

We need hardly add that it needs much grace, much spiritual wisdom, much of the mind of Christ, much nearness to God, to carry out this sort of discipline; but we are persuaded it demands the prayerful attention of Christians; and we may confidently count on the grace of God to enable us to act for Him in this matter.

Psalm 133.

"The dew of Hermon"

The expression "the dew of Hermon" has, it seems, long proved "a geographical puzzle" to some. But to one who has the mind of Christ it is no puzzle, but a most striking and beautiful figure. Hermon is the very loftiest peak in all the land of Palestine, and from its snowy cap, when all the surrounding country is parched, the refreshing dew descends upon the mountains of Zion; and this is one of the figures used by the Holy Ghost to illustrate the beauty and pleasantness of brethren dwelling together in unity.

Let us quote the entire psalm.

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon that descended upon the mountains of Zion; [The interpolated words, "and as the dew," spoil the beauty of the figure.] for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

Here we have two lovely illustrations of unity among brethren. It is like ointment descending from the head of the high priest to the skirts of his garment; and it is like the dew descending, in refreshing power, from Hermon's snowy top.

How truly delightful! And yet they are but figures used to set forth the divine idea of unity among brethren. But how is the unity to be promoted? By living sufficiently near to our great priestly Head to catch the fragrant ointment as it descends from Him — to be living so near the Man in the glory as that the refreshing dew of His grace may drop upon our souls, thus rendering us fragrant and fruitful to His praise.

This is the way to *dwell* in unity with our brethren. It is one thing to talk about unity, and another thing altogether to dwell in it. We may profess to hold "the unity of the body," and "the unity of the Spirit" — most precious and glorious truths surely — and all the

while be really full of selfish strife, party spirit, and sectarian feeling, all of which are entirely destructive of practical unity. If brethren are to dwell together in unity, they must be receiving the ointment from the Head, the refreshing showers from the true Hermon. They must live in the very presence of Christ, so that all their points and angles may be moulded off, all their selfishness judged and subdued, all their own peculiar notions set aside, all their *cues* and crotchets flung to the winds. Thus there will be largeness of heart, breadth of mind, and depth of sympathy. Thus we shall learn to bear and forbear. It will not then be loving those who think with us and feel with us as to some pet theory or other. It will be loving and embracing "all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

The blessed Head loves all His members, and if we are drinking into His spirit, if we are learning of Him, we shall love all likewise. No doubt, those who keep His commandments enjoy His special love — the love of complacency; and so we cannot but specially love those in whom we trace most of His blessed Spirit. But this is a totally different thing from loving people because they adopt *our* line of truth, or *our* peculiar views. It is Christ, and not self; and this is what we want, if we are to "*dwell together in unity.*"

Look at that charming picture presented in Philippians 2. There truly we see, first of all, the divine Head Himself, and from Him the ointment descending to the skirts of His garments. Where did Paul get the grace to enable him to be ready to be poured out as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice of his brethren? What was it that made Timothy care for other people? What led Epaphroditus to put his life in his hand to supply his brethren's lack? What is the one grand answer to all these questions? Simply this: these beloved servants of Christ lived so in their Master's presence, and drank so deeply into His Spirit, they dwelt so near the Man in the glory, that the fragrant ointment, and the refreshing dew, fell upon their souls abundantly, and made them channels of blessing to others.

This, beloved Christian reader, be assured of it, is the grand secret of getting on together. If brethren are to dwell together in unity, they must have the "ointment" and the "dew" dropping continually upon them. They must live close to Christ, and be

occupied with Him, so that they may show forth His virtues, and reflect His blessed image.

Then, what joy to be enabled, in any little measure, to refresh the heart of God! He delights to see His children walking in love. It is He who says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Surely this ought to stir our hearts to seek in every possible way to promote this lovely unity. It should lead us to sink self and all its belongings, to surrender everything that might tend in any measure to alienate our hearts from Christ, or from one another. The Holy Ghost exhorts us *to "endeavour"* to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Let us remember this. It is the unity of the Spirit, not the unity of the body, we are to keep in the uniting bond of peace. This will cost us something. The word "endeavouring" shows that it cannot be done without sacrifice. But the One who so graciously exhorts us to the service will ever supply the needed grace. The ointment and the dew will flow down from Him in refreshing power, knitting our hearts together in holy love, and enabling us to deny ourselves, and surrender everything which might tend to hinder that true unity which we are imperatively called upon to maintain.

Isaiah 6: 1-8.

The Throne and the Altar.

In this sublime passage of Scripture we notice two prominent objects, namely, the throne and the altar; and, moreover, we perceive the action of these two objects upon the soul of the prophet. The entire scene is full of interest and instruction. May we gaze upon it aright!

"In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon *a throne, high and lifted up*, and His train filled the temple." This was a solemn and soul-subduing sight. It is ever a serious matter for a sinner to find himself standing before the throne of God with the unanswered claims of that throne bearing down upon his conscience. Isaiah found it to be so. The light of the throne revealed to him his true condition. And what was that light? It was the moral glory of Christ, as we read in the Gospel of John, "These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him" (Isa. 12: 41). Christ is the perfect standard by which every one must be measured. It matters not what I may think of myself, nor yet what others may think about me: the question is, What am I as viewed in the presence of Christ? The law may tell me what I ought to be; conscience may tell me I am not that; but it is only when the bright beams of Christ's moral glory pour themselves around me that I am enabled to form a just estimate of what I am. Then it is that the hidden chambers of my heart are laid open, the secret springs of action are revealed, the real condition is laid bare.

But perhaps my reader may ask, What do you mean by the moral glory of Christ? I mean the light which shone forth from Him in all His ways when He was down here in this dark world. It was this light that detected man, that disclosed what he was, that brought to light *all* that was in him. It was impossible for any one to escape the action of that light. It was a perfect blaze of divine purity, in view of which the seraphim could only cry out, "Holy, holy, holy!"

Need we marvel then if when Isaiah saw himself in the light of that glory he cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone"? Nay; this was

the proper utterance of one whose heart had been penetrated to its very centre by a light which makes all things perfectly manifest.

We have no reason to suppose that Isaiah was in any respect worse than his neighbours. We are not told that the catalogue of his sins was heavier or darker than that of thousands around him. He may have been to all human appearance just like others. But ah! only remember, I pray you, where the prophet stood when he exclaimed, "Woe is me!" It was not at the foot of the burning mount when "the ministration of death and condemnation" was given forth amid thunderings and lightnings, blackness, darkness, and tempest. It was not there he stood, though even there a Moses had to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake"; but it was in the presence of the glory of Christ, the Lord God of Israel, that our prophet stood when he saw himself to be "unclean" and "undone." Such was his condition when seen in the light which reveals men and things just as they are.

"I am undone." He does not say, "Woe is me! I am not what I ought to be." No; he saw deeper than this. He stood revealed in the power of a light which reaches to the most profound depths of the soul and discloses "the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Isaiah had never before seen himself in such a light — measured himself by such a rule — weighed himself in such a balance. He now saw himself standing in the presence of Jehovah's throne without any ability whatever to meet the claims of that throne. He "saw Jehovah sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." He saw himself a helpless, ruined, guilty sinner at an immeasurable distance from that throne and from the blessed One who sat thereon. He heard the cry of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy"; and the only response which he could send back from the depths of a broken heart was, "Unclean, unclean, unclean." He beheld a gulf of guilt and uncleanness separating him from Jehovah which no effort of his could ever bridge.

Thus it was with him in that solemn moment when he gave forth that cry of a truly convicted soul, "Woe is me!" He was wholly engrossed with one thought, namely, *his own utter ruin*. He felt himself *a lost man*. He thought not of comparing himself with others, nor of seeking out some fellow-sinner worse than he. Ah, no!

a divinely-convicted soul never thinks of such things. There is one grand, all-pervading idea, and that idea is embodied in the words, "I am undone."

And be it carefully noted that the prophet when under the convicting light of the throne is not occupied with what he had done or left undone. The question before his soul was not as to the evil he had done or the good he had left undone. No; it was something far deeper than this. In a word, he was occupied not with his *acts* but with his *condition*. He says, "I *am*" what? Defective in many things? Far behind in my duty? Deplorably short of what I ought to be? No. These and such-like confessions could never embody the experience of a heart on which the bright beams of Jehovah's throne had fallen in convicting power.

True it is "we have done that which we ought not to have done, and left undone that which we ought to have done." But all this is merely the fruit of a nature which is radically corrupt, and when divine light breaks in upon us it will always lead us to the *root*. It will not merely conduct us from leaf to leaf or from branch to branch, but passing down along the trunk it will lay bare the hidden roots of that nature which we inherit by birth from our first parents, and cause us to see that the whole thing is irremediably ruined. Then it is we are constrained to cry out, "Woe is me!" Not because my *conduct* has been defective, but my nature is undone.

Thus it was that Isaiah stood before Jehovah's throne. And oh, what place for a sinner to stand in! There are no excuses there — no palliating circumstances there — no qualifying clauses there — no blaming of men or things there. There is but one object seen there — seen in its guilt, its wretchedness and its ruin, and that object is *self*, and as to that object the tale is easily told. It is all summed up in that most solemn, weighty, suggestive word, "*undone*." Yes; self is undone. That is all that can be said about it. Do what you will with it, and you cannot make it out to be aught but a hopeless, undone thing; and the more speedily and thoroughly this is understood the better.

Many take a long time to learn this foundation truth. They have not, as it were, stood in the full blaze of the throne, and as a

consequence they have not been led to cry out with sufficient depth, emphasis or intensity, "I am undone!" It is the glory that shines from the throne which evokes the cry from the very depths of the soul.

All who have ever stood before that throne have given utterance to the same confession, and it will ever be found that just in proportion to our experience of the *light* of the *throne* will be our experience of the *grace* of the *altar*. The two things invariably go together. In this day of *grace* the throne and the altar are connected. In the day of *judgement* "the great white throne" will be seen without any altar. There will be no grace then. The *ruin* will then be seen without the *remedy*, and as for the *result*, it will be eternal perdition. Awful reality! O beware of having to meet the light of the throne without the provision of the altar!

This conducts us, naturally, to the second object in the interesting scene before us, namely, *the altar*. The very moment Isaiah gave utterance to the deep conviction of what he was, he was introduced to the divine provisions of God's altar. "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

Here, then, we have the rich provisions of Jehovah's altar, which, be it well remembered, is seen in immediate connection with Jehovah's throne. The two things are intimately connected in the history and experience of every convicted and converted soul. The guilt which the throne detects, the altar removes. If in the light of the throne one object is seen, namely, ruined, guilty, undone self; then, in the light of the altar, one object is seen, namely, a full, precious all-sufficient Christ. The remedy reaches to the full extent of the ruin, and the same light that reveals the one reveals the other likewise. This gives settled repose to the conscience.

God Himself has provided a remedy for all the ruin which the light of His throne has revealed. "This *hath touched* thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Isaiah was brought into personal contact with the sacrifice, and the immediate result

was the perfect removal of *all* his iniquity — the perfect purgation of *all* his sin.

Not a single spot remained. He could now stand in the light of that throne which had just detected and exposed his uncleanness and know assuredly by that self-same light that not a speck of uncleanness remained. The very same light which manifested his sin, made manifest also the purging efficacy of the blood.

Such, then, is the precious and beautiful connection between the throne and the altar — a connection which may be easily traced through the inspired volume from Genesis to Revelation, and through the history of God's redeemed from Adam down to the present moment. All who have been really brought to Jesus have experienced the convicting light of the throne and the peace-giving virtues of the altar. All have been made to feel their ruin and cry out, "I am undone!" and all have been brought into personal contact with the sacrifice, and had their sin purged.

God's work is perfect. He convicts perfectly, and He purges perfectly. There is nothing superficial when He carries on His mighty work. The arrow of conviction penetrates to the very centre of the soul, only to be followed by the divine application of that blood which leaves not a stain upon the conscience; and the more deeply we are penetrated by the arrow, the deeper and more settled is our experience of the power of the blood. It is well to be thoroughly searched at the first — well to let the chambers of the heart be fully thrown open to the convicting action of the throne, for then we are sure to get a bolder grasp of that precious atoning blood that speaks peace to every believing heart.

Let me ask you to pause here for a moment and mark the peculiar *style* of the divine action in the case of the prophet.

We all know how much depends upon the way in which a thing is done. A person may do me a favour, but he may do it in such a style as to do away with all the good of it.

Now in the scene before us we not only see a marvellous favour conferred, but conferred after such a fashion as to let us into

the very secrets of the bosom of God. The divine remedy was not only applied to Isaiah's felt ruin, but applied in such a way as to let him know assuredly that the whole heart of God was in the application. "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me." The rapidity of the movement speaks volumes. It tells us distinctly of Heaven's intense desire to tranquillise the convicted conscience, bind up the broken heart and heal the wounded spirit. The energy of divine love gave swiftness to the seraphic messenger as he winged his way down from Jehovah's throne to where a convicted sinner stood confessing himself "undone."

What a scene! One of those very seraphim that with veiled face stood above Jehovah's throne crying, "Holy, holy, holy," passes from that throne to the altar, and from the altar away down to the deep depths of a convicted sinner's heart, there to apply the balmy virtues of a divine sacrifice. No sooner had the arrow from the throne wounded the heart than the seraph from the altar "flew" to heal the wound. No sooner had the throne poured forth its flood of living light to reveal to the prophet the blackness of his guilt than a tide of love rolled down upon him from the altar and bore away upon its bosom every trace of that guilt. Such is the style — such the manner of the love of God to sinners! Who would not trust Him?

Beloved reader, whosoever you are, in earnest desire for the welfare of your immortal soul, permit me to ask you if you have experienced the action of the throne and the altar? Have you ever retired from all that false light which the enemy of your precious soul would fling around you in order to prevent your getting a true insight into your total ruin? Have you ever stood where Isaiah found himself when he cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone"? Have you ever been brought to own from your heart, "I have sinned"? (Job 33) If so, it is your privilege to enter this moment into the rich enjoyment of all that Christ has done for you on the cross.

You do not need to see any vision. You do not require to see a throne, an altar, a flying seraph. You have the Word of God to assure you "Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3: 18). That same Word also assures you that "all that believe *are* justified from all things" (Acts 13: 39).

And is not this far better than many visions or many seraphim? Isaiah believed that his "iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged," when the angelic messenger told him so. And should you not believe that Jesus died for you when the Word of God tells you so?

But perhaps you say, "How can I know that Jesus died for *me*?" I reply, In the way that any one may know it — simply by the Word of God. There is no other way of knowing it. But you still object, "I do not see my name in the Word of God." No; and even though your name were mentioned this would in no wise satisfy you, inasmuch as there might be hundreds bearing your name. But you see your state, your character, your condition. You see your photograph flung, with divine precision, upon the page of inspiration by the action of that light which makes all things manifest.

Do you not own yourself to be a sinner? — a deep-dyed and ruined sinner? If so the death of Christ applies itself as perfectly to you as the "live coal" did to Isaiah when the seraph declared to him, "This hath touched thy lips." The word is, "If any say I have sinned" — What then? He will send him to hell? No; but "he will deliver him." The very moment you take your true place, and cry out, "Undone!" all that Christ has done, and all that He is becomes yours — yours now — yours for ever. You need not make any effort to improve your condition. Do what you will, and you cannot make yourself anything but undone.

A single effort at improvement is but the evidence that you know not yet how bad, how *incurably* bad you are. You are "undone," and, as such, you have to stand still and see the salvation of God — a salvation the foundation of which was wrought out through the cross of Christ — a salvation which the Holy Ghost reveals on the authority of that Word which is settled for ever in Heaven, and which God "has exalted according to all His name." May the blessed Spirit lead you *now* to put your trust in the name of Jesus, that so, ere you lay down this page, you may know that your "iniquity *is* taken away, and your sin purged"! Then you will be able to follow me while, in a few closing words, I seek to unfold the practical result of all that has been engaging our attention.

We have seen the complete *ruin* of the sinner; we have seen the complete *remedy* in Christ; let us now look at the *result*, as exhibited in whole-hearted consecration to the service of God. Isaiah had nothing to do for salvation, but he had plenty to do for his Saviour. He had nothing to do to get his sins purged, but plenty to do for the One who had purged them. Now he gave the willing, ready expression of obedience to God when, on hearing that a messenger was needed, he exclaimed, "Here am I; send me." This puts works in their proper place. The order is absolutely perfect. No one can do good works until he has experienced, in some degree, the action of the "throne" and the "altar." The light of the former must show him what he is, and the provisions of the latter must show him what Christ is ere he can say, "Here am I; send me."

This is a settled, universal truth, established in every section of inspiration, and illustrated in the biography of the saints of God and of the servants of Christ in every age, in every condition. All have been brought to see their *ruin* in the light of the throne, to see the *remedy* in the provisions of the altar ere they could exhibit the *result* in a life of practical devotedness. All this is from God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Holy Ghost — to whom be all the glory, world without end! Amen and Amen!

Jeremiah 15: 19

SEPARATION: NOT FUSION

“Therefore, thus saith the Lord, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth; let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them” (Jer. 15: 19).

The principle laid down in the foregoing passage is of the deepest possible importance to all who desire to walk with God. It is by no means a popular principle; very far from it. But this does not detract from its value in the judgment of those who are taught of God. In an evil world the popular thing is almost sure to be the wrong thing, and whatever has the most of God, the most of Christ, the most of pure truth, is sure to be most unpopular. This is an axiom in the judgment of faith inasmuch as Christ and the world are at opposite points of the moral compass.

Now, one of the most popular ideas of the day is fusion or amalgamation, and all who desire to be accounted men of broad sympathies and liberal sentiments go in for this grand object. But we do not hesitate to clearly state that nothing can be more opposed to the revealed mind of God. We make this statement in the full consciousness of its opposition to the universal judgment of Christendom. For this we are quite prepared. Not that we court opposition, but we have long since learned to distrust the judgment of what is called the religious world, because we have so constantly found *its* judgment to be diametrically opposed to the plainest teaching of Holy Scripture. It is our deep and earnest desire to stand with the Word of God against everything and everyone, for we are well assured that nothing can abide forever except that which is based upon the imperishable foundation of Holy Scripture.

What then does Scripture teach on the subject of this paper? Is it separation or fusion? What was the instruction to Jeremiah in the passage quoted above? Was he told to try and amalgamate with those around him? Was he to seek to mingle the precious with the vile? The very reverse! Jeremiah was taught of God first of all to

return himself, to stand apart even from those who were the professed people of God, but whose ways were contrary to His mind. And what then? "I will bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me."

Here we have Jeremiah's personal path and position most clearly laid down. He was to return and take his stand with God in thorough separation from evil. This was his required duty, regardless of the thoughts of men or of his brethren. They might deem and pronounce him narrow, bigoted, exclusive, intolerant, and the like, but with that he had nothing whatever to do. His one grand business was to obey. Separation from evil was the divine rule, not amalgamation with it. The latter might seem to offer a wider field of usefulness, but mere usefulness is not the object of a true servant of Christ: it is simply obedience. The business of a servant is to do what he is told, not what *he* considers right or good. If this were better understood, it would simplify matters amazingly. If God calls us to separation from evil, but we imagine we can do more good by amalgamation with it, how shall we stand before Him? How shall we meet Him? Will He call that "good" which resulted from positive disobedience to His Word? Is it not plain that our first, our last, our *only* duty is to obey? Assuredly! This is the foundation; yes, it is the sum and substance of all that can really be called good.

But was there not something for Jeremiah to do in his narrow path and circumscribed position? There was. His practice was defined with all possible clearness. What was it? "If thou separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth." He was not only to stand and walk in separation himself, but he was to try to separate others also. This might give him the appearance of a proselytizer or of one whose object was to draw people over to his way of thinking. But here again he had to rise above all the thoughts of men. It was far better, far higher, far more blessed for Jeremiah to be as God's mouth than to stand well with his fellows. What are man's thoughts worth? Just nothing. When his breath goes out of him, in that very hour his thoughts perish. But God's thoughts shall endure forever. If Jeremiah had set about mingling the precious with the vile, he would not have been as God's mouth; he would have

been as the *devil's* mouth. Separation is God's principle; fusion is Satan's.

It is counted liberal, large-hearted and charitable to be ready to associate with all sorts of people. Confederacy, association, limited liabilities, are the order of the day. The Christian must stand apart from all such things, not because he is better than other people, but because God says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." It was not because Jeremiah was better than his brethren that he had to separate himself, but simply because he was commanded to do so by Him whose Word must ever define the course, govern the conduct and form the character of His people. Further, we may rest assured, it was not in sourness of temper or severity of spirit, but in profound sorrow of heart and humility of mind that Jeremiah separated himself from those around him. He could weep day and night over the condition of his people, but the necessity of separation was as plain as the Word of God could make it. He might tread the path of separation with broken heart and weeping eyes, but tread it he must if he would be as God's mouth. Had he refused to tread it, he would have been making himself to be wiser than God. Though those around him, his brethren and friends, might not be able to understand or appreciate his conduct, with this he had nothing whatever to do. He might refer them to Jehovah for an explanation, but his business was to obey, not to explain or apologize.

Thus it is always. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6: 14-18).

It may seem very plausible and very popular to say, "We ought not to judge other people. How can we tell whether people are

believers or not? It is not for us to set ourselves up as holier than others. It is charitable to hope the best. If people are *sincere*, what difference does it make as to creeds? Each one is entitled to hold his own opinions. It is only a matter of views after all.”

To all this we reply, God's Word commands Christians to judge, to discern, to discriminate, to come out, to be separate. This being so, all the plausible arguments and reasonings that can possibly be presented are, in the judgment of a true-hearted, single-eyed servant of Christ, lighter by far than dust.

Hearken to the following weighty words from the blessed apostle Paul to his son Timothy — words bearing down with unmistakable clearness upon all the Lord's people at this very moment. “Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man purge himself from these (the dishonorable vessels), he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2: 19-21).

Here we see that if any man desires to be a sanctified vessel, fit for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work, he must separate himself from the iniquity and the dishonorable vessels around him. There is no getting over this without flinging God's Word overboard; and surely to reject God's Word is to reject Himself. His Word commands me to purge myself, to depart from iniquity, to turn away from those who have a form of godliness, but deny its power.

Amos 5:4, 5

Communion with God: *What is it?*

We are ever in danger of being led astray by using a style of phraseology beyond our actual experience. Every religious denomination has a number of expressions peculiar to itself, and one is liable to adopt such, without being able, practically, to enter into their meaning. Hence the importance of bearing in mind that Christianity is not a mere set of expressions, but a divine reality — a living, acting, powerful influence, infusing itself into all the feelings and affections of the soul, and exhibiting itself in the life.

Now, one of those forms of expression, most frequently used, and little understood, is "communion." Communion with God is the grand secret of the believer's strength, and it is, therefore, of all importance that he should clearly and distinctly understand what it means, and in what it consists; and, moreover, that he should carefully guard against every thing like a counterfeit of it. If one were asked to give a definition of communion, he might reply, It is simple entrance into the thoughts of God; and as the thoughts of God find their grand centre in Jesus, to be able to enter into His thoughts about Jesus constitutes the highest order of communion for the soul. God has highly exalted the blessed Jesus; and when we are enabled, through the Spirit, to do the same, our thoughts are in happy fellowship with God's; and this is what we should seek for. But we should remember that communion with God is a very different thing from communion with a Christian church, be it ever so sound in doctrine, or pure in practice.

However, the point I desire to bring forward in this paper, is the importance of real, personal communion with God, apart from the aid derived even from divine institutions. We must look upon communion as a pure, abstract, independent, holy thing, above and beyond every thing earthly. "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Again, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Under the law there were four things essentially necessary ere acceptable worship could be offered.

1st. A priest of the pure seed of Aaron — pure in race, and pure in person. A man might be of the seed of Aaron, but yet, if he had a single bodily imperfection, a single personal blemish, he dare not approach to offer the bread, or stand at the altar of his God. (See Lev. 21; 22)

2nd. This priest should hold in his hand a *pure* censer — a censer of gold.

3rd. He should place on that censer, *pure* incense.

4th. He should burn this incense with *pure* fire, from off the altar.

It is hardly needful to remind the Christian reader that these things were typical. We must be washed from our sins in the blood of the Lamb, and thus be made priests unto God, ere we can approach the altar. Without the knowledge of these things, there can be no worship. Religiousness there may be in abundance, but no worship. The very object of mere religiousness may often be, to get the soul into the position of a worshipper; and when this is the case, religiousness is put in the place of the precious blood of Christ. Again, as the priest's censer needed to be pure, whereon the incense was consumed, so the heart of the Christian must be duly regulated, ere the sweet odour of grateful praise can possibly ascend to God. Further, as the priest needed pure incense, so now, Christ must be the pure and simple material of our souls' worship. And, lastly, as the incense needed to be consumed by pure fire, so now, the Holy Ghost must kindle in our souls the flame of pure and spiritual adoration. Thus, while with true hearts and Spirit-taught minds we feed on Christ, we present to God the fragrance of acceptable worship.

The above points might be enlarged upon; but enough has been said to show what a purely spiritual thing communion is, and also how needful it is that we should watch against every thing like "strange fire," which is simply the introduction of strange, i.e., of carnal and earthly, elements into our worship. Nor is it merely an openly ungodly thing that may be used as a hindrance, but right things, yea, even divine institutions; indeed, the more any institution

can be proved to be of God, the more need there is of watchfulness, lest it should usurp the place of God in our hearts. The conscience of a believer will easily detect and shrink from that which is manifestly opposed to God and His truth, but he may not so readily see the danger connected with what has been set up of God, and honoured by generations of the faithful in bygone days. Hence the force and suitability of the appeal, "Thus saith the Lord, . . . Seek ye me, and ye shall .live: but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought" Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were all places most sacred in the eyes of a faithful Israelite. Bethel was the spot where Jacob's spirit had first felt the sweetness and solemnity of the divine presence — it was "the house of God" — a spot possessing many charms for the heart, and connected with many hallowed recollections. Such was the character of Bethel in its early days; but, alas! those days were gone by, and Bethel had lost its early glory. Jeroboam had placed a calf there, thus making it the house of a calf, instead of the house of God. Of what value, then, was the house of God, if God had deserted the house? Who would think of attaching importance to the mere name of Bethel, when the God of Bethel was no longer to be found there? No one, whose heart valued God, could ever be satisfied to go to the house of God, and there find only a calf — a mockery — a vanity. Yet this was the very sin of Israel, they allowed Bethel to get between them and the God of Bethel. Hence the importance of the word, "Seek ye ME."

Again, Gilgal was, as we know, the place in which Israel had first tasted the old corn of the land of Canaan, and had the reproach of Egypt rolled away from them. From Gilgal, too, Joshua and his band of conquerors were wont to sally forth to fresh triumphs over the uncircumcised, and thither they returned to enjoy the spoils. Thus was it a place full of holy interest; and, while viewed in connection with the scenes that had been developed there, it might awaken many godly emotions in the heart of a faithful worshipper. But what could render Gilgal valuable, save the spirit and principles which belonged to it? And if these ceased to be known in real power, Gilgal could only prove an empty name, calculated to draw away the heart from living communion with God Himself, and the

more so as it had been a place of truly divine experience to the Lord's people.

Lastly, Beersheba was "the well of the oath," a place rendered dear, for many reasons, to the posterity of Isaac, yet only really valuable in proportion as the circumstance which had given it its name was kept in view.

Thus we see how the sacred antiquity of the above places would act as a snare to the heart of an Israelite, and tend to draw him away from God. Indeed, it was the fact of their being associated with so many hallowed recollections, with so much that was really of God, that would constitute them such dangerous snares. The devil does not present to the Christian things flagrantly evil and unsound; he knows that such would at once be rejected; but he works by the instrumentality of things which have an appearance of truth and godliness about them; yea, and things too which, it may be, had once the divine sanction, but which, after all, will not bear the searching light of the Word. It would not do for an Israelite to have rested satisfied with the old institutions of Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba; he might be most diligent in seeking after these, and yet stand much in need of the exhortation, "Seek ye ME"

What, then, is the moral we are invited to draw from the above train of thought? Simply this, Communion with God, and Communion with divine institutions, are very different things; we may often lose the former, in our zeal for the latter. How often have we displayed much zeal in contending for some Christian institutions, while, perhaps, our souls were barren and void of personal communion with Christ Himself. How often, too, like the disciples going to Emmaus, have we talked much about *the things connected with Christ*, when, if *He Himself* were to draw near, we should not know Him. At such times, it might very reasonably have been said to us, "Seek not to institutions — seek not to ordinances — seek not merely the things which are connected with Christ, but seek *Himself* — His own blessed Person — the divine reality of personal fellowship with the risen Son of God, without which the fairest institutions are powerless — and the most solemn ordinances cold and lifeless." Nor is it only to merely human ordinances that all this would apply, but even to that which is of divine authority; for

example, the Lord's Supper — the ministry of the Word — Christian fellowship, &c., all of which are, as it were, folds of the drapery which may have Christ beneath for a soul that really seeks Him therein, but which may only tend to conceal Him from the view of those who are engaged and attracted by outward form rather than by truth, and spirit, and life.

Let us, then, seek to realize the person of Christ. Let us endeavour to find Him, in the breaking of bread — in the ministry of the Word — in the fellowship of Christians — in the offering up of prayer and praise — in a word, in everything in which He has told us He will be found; but let us not mistake happiness in these things for happiness in God, lest we be found, in our sphere, and according to our measure, helping on, in the peculiar evil of the last days, A FORM OF GODLINESS WITHOUT THE POWER.

Zechariah 9:12

The Prisoner of Hope.

There are two leading principles in the soul of the Christian, which make God the special object. These are "faith and hope." There is a marked distinction, and yet an intimate connection, between these two principles. Faith takes what God has given; hope expects what He has promised. Faith rests in holy tranquility in God's statements about the *past*; hope goes forth in active longings after the *future*. Faith is a recipient; hope an expectant. Now, it will be found that, in proportion to the vigour of faith, will be the vigour of hope. If we be not "fully persuaded that what God has promised, He is able also to perform," we shall know but little of the power or energy of hope. If faith be wavering, hope will be flickering. On the contrary, if faith be strong, hope will be strong also; for faith, while it nourishes and strengthens the persuasion, imparts strength and intensity to the expectation. Thus, the soul, in the happy exercise of the above principles, is like a climbing plant which, striking its roots downward into the soil, sends forth its tendrils along the nearest wall or tree. So the soul finds its root in the eternal record of God, while it sends forth the tendrils of an imperishable hope to grasp tenaciously the faithful promise of God; and, we may say, the deeper the root, the stronger the tendril.

The patriarch Abraham was a happy exemplification of all this; his "faith and hope" were truly "in God." Circumstances added nothing to him. He had been promised the whole land of Canaan, where he had not so much as to set his foot on; he had been promised a seed like the stars of heaven, or like the sand by the sea shore, when as yet he had no child. Thus, neither his faith nor his hope could have drawn any nutriment from circumstances, for everything within the range of mortal vision argued against him. But the promise of "the Almighty God" was quite enough for the man of faith. With nought but that, he started forth as a pilgrim and a stranger, having no foundation for his hopes that could at all be recognised by "flesh and blood." Abraham had heard a voice which the children of this world could not hear, even the voice of "the God of glory," calling him forth from the midst of his worldly

circumstances to be "a prisoner of hope." The Lord had directed his thoughts upward — He had called him from earth to heaven — from the earthly Babel to the heavenly Jerusalem — from the baseless city of man, to the well-founded city of God.

Thus was it with all the patriarchs and witnesses whose honoured names the Spirit has recorded, for our encouragement, in Hebrews 11. "They all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They died as they had lived, "prisoners of hope." An unbelieving world might scoff and sneer at them, and wonder why they had given up the apparently substantial realities of earth to live and die without anything. But their "faith and hope" were in God, and not in circumstances. Faith enabled them to rest with tranquilized spirits upon the record of God, while hope carried them onward into the future, and converted it into the present.

But the verse which stands at the head of this paper presents the believer in two most interesting aspects, viz., as the recipient of *grace*, and the expectant of *glory* — as one safely lodged in a "stronghold," but yet as "a prisoner of hope" — as one in the enjoyment of perfect peace, and also living in the blessed hope of better things. These two points may afford matter for profitable reflection, through the Lord's mercy.

There is only one thing that can render the soul happy in looking forward into the future, and that is the knowledge of God's redeeming love in giving His Son to be a perfect sacrifice for sin. Until this is known, the mind will never reach beyond the question of mere individual salvation, which, after all, is but selfishness. The human heart is, in a measure, conscious that all is not right with it, and hence it is ill at ease at the thought of the future. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment." Death and judgment form a gloomy prospect for man to contemplate. Death draws aside the curtain and reveals the terrible future — it launches the poor soul forth into the boundless ocean of eternity, without anything to sustain or guide it. But "the one offering of Jesus Christ" brings the soul into new ground, alters its point of view, and removes the clouds from the prospect. "So," says the apostle, "Christ

was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9: 28). The sinner must get at the other side of the cross ere he can happily or peacefully look forward. In other words, we can only study prophecy with a purged conscience. It is when we know, through the Spirit, the value of the sufferings of Christ, that we can joyfully contemplate the glory that is to follow. The unconverted, therefore, have nothing to do with prophecy. To them the throne from whence Jehovah reveals His deep counsels is surrounded with thick clouds and darkness, and sends forth nothing but thunderings and lightnings. The prophetic book is sealed with seven seals, and none but the *Lamb* can open it.

If, then, it be true that a purged conscience is needful ere prophecy can be rightly studied, we need not wonder that so little is known about it by those who consider it the highest point of Christian attainment to be able to feel that the conscience is cleansed from every stain. Until the grand doctrine of forgiveness — full, free, and eternal forgiveness — is known as the unquestionable portion of the soul, through the finished work of the Lamb of God, no marvel that every other question, be it ever so important, should be held in abeyance. The value and efficacy of *grace* must be known ere *glory* is thought of. That grace which brings salvation must first be received before "the blessed hope" can be enjoyed.

All this leads us to see the distinction between the work of the evangelist and that of the teacher. The evangelist should lead the sinner to see that the work on which his soul is to rest has been accomplished, and that he cannot, by any possibility, add thereto. He has to convey a simple message concerning an accomplished work, which work must be the basis of the poor guilty sinner's peace. He does not assume anything with respect to those to whom he speaks, but that they are dead in trespasses and sins — dead as Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, and as unable to live or move. The evangelist is privileged to stand in the midst of a ruined, self-destroyed, guilty world; and there to offer salvation, in the name of his Master, to all who will believe the word concerning the cross. It is of the utmost importance that all who occupy the position of evangelists should clearly understand the nature and limits of their work, and the terms

of their commission. It too often happens that preachers of the gospel mar their work by intruding upon the province of the teacher. They think it incumbent on them to press upon the attention of people the fruits that result from the reception of the gospel, lest they should be suspected of antinomianism. This is, properly speaking, the work of the teacher, who has to do only with those who have passed under the hand of the evangelist. The teacher has no more to do with *sinner*s than the evangelist has to do with *saints*.*

{*Of course, we may often see the gift of an evangelist and a teacher developed in the same person. Where they are thus combined, great care is needed not to confound them in their exercise}

Nor is the teacher to confine himself to the matter of pressing upon the conscience of the believer his responsibilities; he has also to instruct him in the nature of his hope, he has to expound to him the book of prophecy, according to the wisdom of the Holy Ghost. The evangelist has to speak of what God *has* done; the teacher, of what He *will* do. The former calls for the action of faith; the latter, for the action of hope — the former points to the stronghold; the latter speaks to the prisoner of hope. If these things be confounded, the effect will be most pernicious. It is as wrong for the unbeliever to be addressed on the subject of the hopes of the Church, as it is for the believer to be confined to the question of the forgiveness of sins. The enemy of souls may often work much mischief by leading the unregenerate to exercise their intellects on the subject of prophecy. He is doing so at the present day, seeing he has not been able to prevent Christians from searching into their Father's testimonies concerning the future. The devil will endeavour either to suppress or corrupt the truth of God. For ages he succeeded in keeping the Church of Christ from the perception of the precious, doctrine of the coming of the Lord; and now that attention has been awakened on the subject, he is maliciously seeking to nullify it by causing unhallowed lips to proclaim and teach it, or by causing Christians to differ about it.

Now, the remedy for both these dangerous evils is the simple understanding of the Christian's place, as a prisoner of hope. It is not

to amuse the intellect, nor to please the fancy, that the Spirit of God has spoken of the Church's destinies. No; it is for the purpose of comforting the prisoner, by giving him a well grounded hope. Nor is it for any, save those who find themselves within the stronghold of the blood-stricken door, that the prospect of rest and glory has been painted in the distance. Looking at the believer in one aspect of his character, he is like the Israelite within the blessed circle of peace which redemption had described around him, feeding on the lamb whose blood had secured his peace, with girded loins, waiting for the first beams of the morning, to leave the land of death and darkness to proceed on his way toward the land of rest. So the believer, resting in the atoning efficacy of the blood of Christ, is privileged to look forward to "the morning without clouds," not that he may then know, for the first time, that he is accepted in the Beloved, but that he may enter into all the rich and ineffable fruits of redeeming love. Thus, the believer is a prisoner of hope. His faith reposes on the cross — his hope feeds upon the rich pastures of God's prophetic record. His spirit travels over a course of which the cross is the starting-post, and glory the goal. He finds it

"Sweet to look back and see his name

In life's fair book set down;

Sweet to look forward and behold

Eternal joys his own."

The two points are inseparable. It is only when we find it sweet to look back, that we also find it sweet to look forward. We must see our names in the fair book of life, written there in indelible characters, before we can understand our title to eternal joys. It is impossible that any one can rightly enter upon the investigation of the doctrine of the hopes of the Church, until his spirit has been perfectly tranquillized by the blood of atonement. To the unwashed soul the prospect is unspeakably dreadful. "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." Prophecy conveys a twofold message; it tells of unmitigated judgment to the man who is yet in his sins; and it tells of incorruptibility and eternal life to the man who has believed in the

love of God as displayed in the gift of His Son. Hence, to the former, it must be a most unwelcome messenger; to the latter, the bearer of most gladsome tidings: to the former it speaks of the complete shipwreck, to the latter, the glorious consummation of all his hopes.

The children of this world are not prisoners of hope, they are prisoners under condemnation; they wait, not to be emancipated, but to be executed; it is not endless rest, but endless torment, that lies before them. Miserable prospect! O ye men of this world, what will it be when your cup of pleasure shall be dashed from your lips for ever? when the world, that idol for which you have lived and laboured, and at whose altar you have sacrificed everything, shall pass away into everlasting destruction? What would you not then give to find yourselves in a stronghold — even in the stronghold which faith finds in the sacrifice of Christ? It is nothing but the blindest infatuation to give up God's future for man's present — to sell the coming glory of Christ for the present glory of the world. Far better to endure the temporary privations of a prisoner's life here, than to suffer an eternal imprisonment with Satan and his angels. Poor sinner, the crucified Jesus calls upon you to "turn to the stronghold;" to take refuge, by faith, beneath the shadow of the cross, and there to wait, as a prisoner of hope, for the glory which shall speedily be revealed from heaven. And you, Christian reader, who have, through grace, found rest for your wearied spirit, do you seek to know more of what is involved in that title, "a prisoner of hope."

We can form some idea of the intensity of a prisoner's longing for the day of release; we may imagine how eagerly a prisoner of old would long to hear the soul-stirring note of the trumpet of jubilee, announcing his complete deliverance from captivity. We know full well that it is not with the gloomy and crumbling walls of his prison-house that the prisoner engages his attention; he seeks not to decorate or render them stable. No; he groans and sighs for deliverance. Just so should it ever be with us. We should unceasingly "groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." "We," says the apostle, "that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened; not that we would be

unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Here is the proper language of a prisoner of hope. It is not merely groaning to be set free from the cage in which we are pent up, but "to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." Doubtless, we feel the sorrow and trial of our present position; we are made to taste the irksomeness and roughness of the journey; we are called to enter into the painfulness of being imprisoned in a body of sin and death. In a word, "we groan, being burdened." Nevertheless, the putting off of the earthly tabernacle would not perfectly remedy the case. To be unclothed as to our spirits would not make us perfectly happy. Very many Christians err in their thoughts on this subject. They think that the moment the spirit escapes from its prison-house, it enters into perfect bliss. That such is not the case, the passage just quoted most fully proves. Nothing can fill up the measure of the believer's joy, but his being clothed upon with his house which is from heaven; for, until then, whether he be imprisoned in the tomb, or in a body of sin and death, death and mortality bear sway, so far as the body is concerned; but when he appears in his resurrection garments of glory and beauty, death shall have been swallowed up in victory, and mortality swallowed up of life. To speak of perfect bliss, while the spirit is unclothed and the body mingled with the dust is a contradiction.

There are, I believe, but four places in the New Testament where the state of the unclothed spirit is spoken of, and in none of these have we anything approaching to a full description of that state. When contrasting, it with our present painful and trying condition, the apostle says, "*it is far better.*" Yes, truly, it is "far better" to be at rest from our labours than toiling here — far better to be away from a scene of strife and turmoil, where everything tends to draw out the vileness of nature. But all this would not constitute the summit of blessedness. How very differently the Holy Ghost speaks of the resurrection state! It would be out of the question to think of citing, or even referring, to, the various passages in which this glorious subject is treated of. The New Testament abounds with them. Nor is there any mystery or vagueness in the manner in which it is put before us. No; we are clearly, explicitly, and simply taught

that the resurrection and the glories connected with it will constitute the very consummation of the believer's joy and blessedness; and, moreover, that, until then, he is but a prisoner of hope. The patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the noble army of martyrs — all our beloved brethren who have gone before us — yea, and the Master Himself — all wait for the morning of resurrection. "These all, having obtained a good report, through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better things for us, that they, *without us*, should not be made perfect." God must gather His family together — the grave must let go from its grasp every redeemed one — every scattered member of the flock of Christ must be gathered into the heavenly fold ere the festivities of the kingdom can commence.

Thus we see the vast importance of being rightly instructed as to the nature of our hope. When we know what we are hoping for, we are able to give an answer; yea, our lives answer. *A man's life is always influenced by his genuine hopes*. If a man be an heir to an estate, his life is influenced by the hope of inheriting it; and if we knew more of the power of the Spirit as "the earnest of our inheritance," instead of disputing about the time or manner of our Master's arrival, we should, as "*prisoners of hope*," be anxiously looking forth from our prison windows, and saying, "Why is His chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?"

Oh! that all who have found a stronghold in the Cross of Jesus may say more earnestly, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Malachi, Jude

THE CLOSING SCENES OF MALACHI AND JUDE

In comparing these two inspired writings, we find many points of similarity and many points of contrast. Both the prophet and apostle portray scenes of ruin, corruption and apostasy. The former is occupied with the ruin of Judaism, the latter with the ruin of Christendom. The prophet Malachi, in his opening sentences, gives with uncommon vividness the source of Israel's blessing and the secret of their fall. "I have loved you, saith the Lord." Here was the grand source of all their blessedness, all their glory, all their dignity. Jehovah's love accounts for all the brighter glories of Israel's past and all the brighter glories of Israel's future. On the other hand, their bold and infidel challenge, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" accounts for the deepest depths of Israel's present degradation.

To put such a question, after all that Jehovah had done for them from the days of Moses to the days of Solomon, proved a condition of heart insensible to the very last degree. Those who, with the marvelous history of Jehovah's actings before their eyes, could say, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" were beyond the reach of all moral appeal. Therefore, we need not be surprised at the prophet's burning words. We are prepared for such sentences as the following: "If then I be a father, where is My honor? and if I be a master, where is My fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests that despise My name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy name?" There was the most thorough insensibility both as to the Lord's love and as to their own evil ways. There was the hardness of heart that could say, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" and "Wherein have we wronged Thee?" And all this with the history of a thousand years before their eyes — a history overlapped by the unexampled grace, mercy and patience of God, a history stained from first to last with the record of their unfaithfulness, folly and sin.

But let us hearken to the touching remonstrances of the grieved and offended God of Israel. "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that ye

say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts... who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even His meat is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame and the sick; thus ye brought an offering; should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord.”

Here then we have a sad and dreary picture of Israel's moral condition. The public worship of God had fallen into utter contempt. His altar was insulted, His service despised. As to the priests, it was a mere question of money. As to the people, the whole thing had become a weariness, an empty formality, a dull and heartless routine. There was no heart for God. There was plenty of heart for gain. Any sacrifice, however maimed and torn, was deemed good enough for the altar of God. The lame, the blind and the sick, the very worst that could be had, such as they would not dare to offer to a human governor, was laid on the altar of God. And if a door was to be opened or a fire kindled, it must be paid for. No pay, no work. Such was the lamentable condition of things in the days of Malachi. It makes the heart sick to contemplate it.

But, thanks and praise be to God, there is another side of the picture. There were some rare and lovely exceptions to the gloomy rule — some striking and beautiful forms standing out in relief from the dark background. It is truly refreshing in the midst of all this venality and corruption, coldness and hollowness, barrenness and heartlessness, pride and stoutness of heart, to read such words as these: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another;

and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.”

How precious is this brief record! How delightful to contemplate this remnant in the midst of the moral ruin! There is no pretension or assumption, no attempt to set up anything, no effort to reconstruct the fallen economy, no affected display of power. Here is felt-weakness and a looking to Jehovah. This is the true secret of all real power. We need never be afraid of conscious weakness. It is impressive strength that we have to dread and shrink from. “When I am weak, then am I strong” is ever the rule for the people of God — a blessed rule, most surely. God is to be counted upon always. We may lay it down as a great root principle that, no matter what may be the actual state of the professing body, individual faith can enjoy communion with God according to the very highest truth of the dispensation.

This is a grand principle to grasp and hold fast. Let the professing people of God be ever individuals who judge and humble themselves before God, who can enjoy His presence and blessing without hindrance or limit. Witness the Daniels, the Mordecais, the Ezras, the Nehemiahs, the Josiahs, the Hezekiahs, and scores of others who walked with God, carried out the highest principles and enjoyed the rarest privileges of the dispensation, when all lay in hopeless ruin around them. There was a passover celebrated in the days of Josiah such as had not been known from the days of Samuel the prophet (2 Chr. 35: 18). The feeble remnant, on their return from Babylon, celebrated the feast of tabernacles, a privilege which had not been tasted since the days of Joshua the son of Nun (Neh. 8: 17). Mordecai, without ever striking a blow, gained as splendid a victory over Amalek as that achieved by Joshua in the days of Exodus 17 (Esther 6: 11-12). In the book of Daniel we see earth's proudest monarch prostrate at the feet of a captive Jew.

What do all these cases teach us? What lesson do they tell out in our ears? Simply that the humble, believing and obedient soul is permitted to enjoy the very deepest and richest communion with God, in spite of the failure and ruin of God's professing people and the departed glory of the dispensation in which his lot is cast.

Thus it was in the closing scenes of Malachi. All was in hopeless ruin, but that did not hinder those who loved and feared the Lord from getting together to speak about Him and to muse upon His precious name. True, that feeble remnant was not like the great congregation which assembled in the days of Solomon, from Dan to Beersheba, but it had a glory unique to itself. It had the divine presence in a way no less marvelous though not so striking. We are not told of any "book of remembrance" in the days of Solomon. We are not told of Jehovah's hearkening and hearing. Perhaps it may be said, there was no need. Be it so, but that does not dim the luster of the grace that shone upon the little band in the days of Malachi. We may boldly affirm that Jehovah's heart was as refreshed by the loving breathings of that little band as by the splendid sacrifice in the days of Solomon's dedication. Their love shines out all the brighter in contrast with the heartless formalism of the professing body, and the corruption of the priests.

"And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts."

We shall now briefly glance at the epistle of Jude. Here we have a still more appalling picture of apostasy and corruption. It is a familiar saying among us, that the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption. Hence it is that the Apostle Jude spreads before us a page so very much darker and more awful than that presented by the prophet Malachi. It is the record of man's utter failure and ruin under the very highest and richest privileges which could be conferred upon him.

In the opening of his solemn address, the apostle lets us know that it was laid upon his heart “to write unto us of the common salvation.” This would have been his far more delightful task. It would have been his joy and his refreshment to expand upon the present privileges and future glories wrapped up in the comprehensive folds of that precious word “salvation.” But he felt it “needful” to turn from this more congenial work to fortify our souls against the rising tide of error and evil which threatened the very foundations of Christianity. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should *earnestly contend for the faith* which was once delivered unto the saints.” All that was vital and fundamental was at stake. It was a question of earnestly contending for the faith itself. “For there are certain men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation; ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is far worse than anything we have in Malachi. There it was a question of the law, as we read, “Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.” But in Jude it is not a question of forgetting the law, but of actually turning into sensualness the pure and precious grace of God, and denying the Lordship of Christ. Therefore, instead of dwelling upon the salvation of God, the apostle seeks to fortify us against the wickedness and lawlessness of men. “I will therefore,” he says, “put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”

All this is most solemn, but we cannot dwell upon the dark features of this scene: space does not allow it. Besides, we rather desire to present to the Christian reader the charming picture of the Christian remnant given in the closing lines of this most searching scripture. As in Malachi we have amid the helpless ruin of Judaism, a devoted band of Jewish worshipers who loved and feared the Lord

and took sweet counsel together, so in Jude, amid the more appalling ruins of Christian profession, the Holy Spirit introduces a company whom He addresses as “Beloved.” These are “sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” These He solemnly warns against the varied forms of error and evil which were already beginning to make their appearance, but have since assumed such formidable proportions. To these He turns, with the most exquisite grace, and addresses the following exhortation, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

Here we have divine security against all the dark and terrible forms of apostasy — “the way of Cain, the error of Baalam, the gainsaying of Core, the murmurers and complainers, the great swelling words, the raging waves, the wandering stars, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.” The “beloved” are to “build themselves up on their most holy faith.”

Let the reader note this. There is not a syllable here about an order of men to succeed the apostles, not a word about gifted men of any sort. It is well to see this and to bear it ever in mind. We hear a great deal of our lack of gift and power, of our not having pastors and teachers. How could we expect to have much gift or power? Do we deserve them? Regretfully we have failed and sinned and come short. Let us own this and cast ourselves upon the living God who never fails a trusting heart.

Look at Paul's touching address to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20. To whom does he there commend us in view of the passing away of apostolic ministry? Is there a word about successors to the apostles? Not one, unless indeed it be the “grievous wolves” of which he speaks or those men who were to arise in the very bosom of the Church, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. What then is the resource of the faithful? “I commend you *to God and to the Word of His grace*, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

What a precious resource! Not a word about gifted men, valuable as such may be in their right place. God forbid we should

in any way depreciate the gifts which, in spite of all the failure and sin, our gracious Lord may see fit to bestow upon His Church. But still it holds good that the blessed apostle, in taking leave of the Church, commends us not to gifted men, but to God Himself and the Word of His grace. Hence it follows that, let our weakness be ever so great, we have God to look to and to lean upon. He never fails those who trust Him. There is no limit whatsoever to the blessing which our souls may taste, if only we look to God in humility of mind and childlike confidence.

Here lies the secret of all true blessedness and spiritual power — humility of mind and simple confidence. There must on the one hand be no assumption of power, and on the other, we must not, in the unbelief of our hearts, limit the goodness and faithfulness of our God. He can and does bestow gifts for the building up of His people. He would bestow much more if we were not so ready to manage for ourselves. If the Church would but look more to Christ her living Head and loving Lord, instead of to the arrangements of men and the methods of this world, she would have a very different tale to tell. But if we, by our unbelieving plans and our restless efforts to provide a machinery for ourselves, quench, hinder and grieve the Holy Spirit, need we marvel if we are left to prove the barrenness and emptiness, the desolation and confusion of all such things? Christ is sufficient, but He must be proved, He must be trusted, He must be allowed to act. The platform must be left perfectly clear for the Holy Spirit to display thereon the preciousness, the fullness, the all-sufficiency of Christ.

But it is precisely in this very thing we so remarkably fail. We try to hide our weakness instead of owning it. We seek to cover our nakedness by a drapery of our own providing, instead of confiding simply and entirely in Christ for all we need. We grow weary of the attitude of humble patient waiting. We are in haste to put on an appearance of strength. This is our folly and our grievous loss. If we could only be induced to believe it, our real strength is to know our weakness and cling to Christ in absolute faith from day to day.

It is to this most excellent way that the apostle Jude exhorts the Christian remnant in his closing lines. “Ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith.” These words set forth the

responsibility of all true Christians to be found together instead of being divided and scattered. We are to help one another in love, according to the measure of grace bestowed and the nature of the gift communicated. It is a mutual thing — "building up yourselves." It is not looking to an order of men, nor is it complaining of our lack of gifts, but simply each doing what he can to promote the common blessing and profit of all.

The reader will notice the four things which we are exhorted to do, namely "Building," "Praying," "Keeping," "Looking." What blessed work is here! Yes, and it is work for all. There is not one true Christian on the face of the earth who cannot fulfill any or all of these branches of ministry. Indeed every person is responsible so to do. We can build ourselves up on our most holy faith, we can pray in the Holy Spirit, we can keep ourselves in the love of God, and while doing these things we can look out for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It may be asked, "Who are the beloved? To whom does the term apply?" Our answer is, "To whomsoever it may concern." Let us see to it that we are on the ground of those to whom the precious title applies. It is not *assuming* the title, but *occupying* the true moral ground. It is not empty profession, but real possession. It is not claiming the name, but being the thing.

Nor does the responsibility of the Christian remnant end here. It is not merely of themselves they have to think. They are to cast a loving look and stretch forth a helping hand beyond the circumference of their own circle. "And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." Who are the "some?" and who are the "others?" Is there not the same beautiful undefinedness about these as there is about the "Beloved?" These latter will be at no loss to find out the former. There are precious souls scattered up and down amid the appalling ruins of Christendom, "some" of them to be looked upon with tender compassion, "others" to be saved with godly fear, lest the "beloved" should become involved in the defilement.

It is a fatal mistake to suppose that, in order to pluck people out of the fire, we must go into the fire ourselves. This would never do. The best way to deliver people from an evil position *is to be thoroughly out of that position myself*. How can I best pull a man out of a morass? Surely not by going into the morass, but by standing on firm ground and from there lending him a helping hand. I cannot pull a man out of anything unless I am out myself. If we want to help the people of God who are mixed up with the surrounding ruin, the first thing for ourselves is to be in thorough and decided separation. The next thing is to have our hearts brimful and flowing over with tender and fervent love to all who bear the precious name of Jesus.

Here we must close, and in doing so we shall quote for the reader that blessed doxology with which the apostle sums up his solemn and weighty address. “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” We have a great deal about “falling” in this epistle -Israel falling, angels falling, cities falling, but blessed be God, there is One who is able to keep us from falling, and it is to His holy keeping we are committed.