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The Woman Of Samaria

John 4:1-26

There are three chapters in this Gospel of John which speak of the effects and operations of the Spirit of God. The first is one with which we are all doubtless familiar; namely, chapter 3, which brings before us the power and efficacy of the Holy Ghost in His quickening office—bringing forth dead souls, and causing them to be born again. Another is chapter 7, which shews the internal effect of the indwelling of the Spirit, being described by our Lord as “rivers of living water.” “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” And it is added, “This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.” And in chapter 4 it is very expressly spoken of as “living water,” and “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” It may be profitable now for us to advert to this subject, and consider it attentively, to ascertain how it is spoken of; what are its operations; and whether we find it in ourselves, as believers, a well of water springing up; and shew how it is rejected by them that believe not.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the giver of the Holy Spirit to them that believe; He is the fountain and giver of all good: all blessings are obtained by His sacrifice and intercession, and in no other way. Indeed it is the only way God can be a giver to sinful man; there is no possibility of His giving any blessings to us as sinners except through this channel. As sinners, our intercourse with God is suspended for ever, except through Christ; but through Him the most intimate intercourse is

restored. We lost it by virtue of our association with sin, and were then cast out from the presence of God, bringing forth fruit to the flesh, the world, and Satan. How could any intercourse subsist between God and us in that state? The thing was impossible. But by the finished work of Christ, and in virtue of His resurrection, having taken His people from their former position, and set them in a perfectly distinct state, He brings them into fellowship with the Father, into (as far as regards His work) an unhindered communion with God. They come to know Christ then as the medium of communication, of fellowship, and of intercourse; they see themselves by faith in the presence of God, in the Person of Jesus, and thus have free and unrestrained communion with Him. Just as by faith they saw themselves cast out from God, so by faith are they brought again into His presence. Now they are practically conscious that they are driven out—that they were justly excluded, having wandered from the way of holiness. This was the fruit of their own work; and then by faith they learn practically, that on the work of the Lord is founded that association which, making them one with Him, brings them into the nearest union and closest communion with God. They see the transfer of sin, and the transfer of righteousness, bringing them into this state. He was made “sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” In Him we see the whole body—the church gathered into one—being made divine righteousness, and so presented to God. We see Him before God perfect, and we (I speak of believers) in Him. This blessed righteousness is made known to us by the Spirit which Christ sends down from heaven, and so leads up the souls of His people to a participation in His

happiness. By seeing themselves and their own state by nature, He leads them out of themselves into Christ. But this is the gift of God. This is what Christ promised while on earth: “When the Comforter is come, he shall convince the world of sin, and of righteousness.”

Now it is in full agreement with this that the chapter before us unfolds itself—a chapter replete with most wonderful facts of God’s wisdom, and His mighty love. The Pharisees were jealous and murmured at hearing that Jesus had made more disciples than John. Jesus therefore, to follow peace with all men, left Judea, and departed again into Galilee, going through Samaria; there being, in His eternal counsel, a needs-be for it—even to meet with one poor sinner. He had taken a long journey; He was wearied, and He sat down on the well to recover His exhausted strength. Indeed it was a world of weariness to Him while He laboured in it. He had left His rest which He had with the Father from all eternity—had left His home of glory and of blessedness, and come down to this sinful world to be wearied indeed. There was everything around to make Him weary—sin, hatred, ingratitude, ill-will, and open opposition, and toil j but, though wearied in the contemplation of these, He was never wearied in the testimony of love: this was meat they knew not of. When driven by exhaustion and persecution from the crowd, we find love taking Him into desert places apart, to pray. There was no love of bodily ease, no selfishness dictating His conduct in any particular: it was one unmitigated scene of active love. He was wrapped up in the one sole object for which He was on earth, and nothing could divert Him.

We see how full His whole soul was on the subject from the circumstances related in this chapter. The

providence of God had (so to speak) brought Him to Samaria. What do we find Him there doing? Just sitting alone with a wicked sinner by the side of a well to settle the great question of eternity with her, to shew her herself, and to make known Himself to her. And this He does now to every soul whom He calls to Himself—just sits alone with them, leads them into the recesses of their own hearts, and then makes known to them in whose presence they are, leading them to ask those gifts which He had prepared for them. In the case of this poor sinful woman we see the blessed way in which the Lord led her. She, full of her worldly employment, unconscious whom she was to meet, came to the well. He first asks her for a drink—a drink of cold water!—considered the very poorest and meanest gift which this world contains. See how the Lord humbled Himself! Among the Jews it was considered the depth of degradation even to hold any communion or converse with the Samaritans; to be beholden to them for a favour would not be tolerated by them. But here we have the Lord of glory asking for a drink of water from one of the worst in the city of the Samaritans! Such was His humiliation, that the woman herself wonders that such a request should be made from a Jew to one whom the Jews ever looked upon and treated with the greatest contempt.

Now, brethren, just think of this; do just contemplate the mind and the spirit in which He met this poor outcast—this wicked Samaritan. He did not enter into argument about the prejudices of the Jews, or their justice in thus treating their neighbours; His mind was on the one subject—her salvation; and therefore He needs nothing else. He answered and said unto her, “If thou knewest

the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Now there is the great truth, the ignorance of which ruins the world. They do not know who it is that is asking them to give Him a drink—still beseeching them to be reconciled—" We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God "—still entreating them, in terms of the greatest gentleness and love, to give themselves to Him—still in this character of petitioner for a favour. The point of distinction which the world knows not is this, that it is the Son of God who thus humbles Himself to ask sinners to come; that it is the Lord of glory doing it— the Son of the eternal God doing it. They know not who it is that is asking them, and therefore they ask not from Him that gift without which they never can enter into the kingdom of God. "If thou knewest … who it is that saith to thee, … thou wouldest have asked of him."

We come then to inquire, What is this gift? The gift of God. Living water. A well of water—a springing well—springing up continually into eternal life. There are just two things to be considered: first, what it is—namely, the giving of the Holy Spirit; secondly, who it is that gives it —Christ. To have known the latter would have been to have asked for the former. It is the knowledge of whom we have to do with that puts us upon asking for His gifts; for this gift of the Holy Spirit in us (which is Christ's to give) is to be in the believer a well—always living water—not a pool, which, though full, may be liable to be dried up, but a well that cannot dry up. There is the fountain which can never be exhausted that is given to him—is put into him, and lives and abides for ever. Now this is the promise to the believer— "The

water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Now the possession of this water must consist, first, in the knowledge of the Giver of it: without that there must be total ignorance, darkness, stupidity, and entire inapprehension and inability to recognise or understand the worth or value of the gift, or its spiritual signification. As in the case before us, the woman’s mind took in nothing of this, because she was ignorant of Him with whom she was speaking; her mind could not therefore apprehend the truth, and we see her carnal reason entirely misconstruing it, and turning it into another channel. “Sir,” she said, “thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? “And here we see what her mind was occupied with —the world, the duties, pursuits, and employments of the world; and so she could not rise to any higher thoughts— could not see who it was that spoke, nor what He was offering to her attention. And thus blinded is the world, led away from the things of Christ, by the things of time and sense. Satan uses these things as instruments in his hands of keeping the soul from Christ. Let it be what it may, let it be only a waterpot, he cares not, so that it occupies the mind to the exclusion of the knowledge of Christ. He cares not for the instrument, so that he gains his own end, to draw the mind away from the apprehension of spiritual things. It may be pleasure, it may be amusement, gain, reputation, family duties, lawful employments, so that it keeps the soul from fixing on Christ. This is all he wants. A waterpot will serve his purpose, just as well as a palace, so that he can blind them, “lest the light of the

glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

I ask you now, my friends, Is there nothing which is thus keeping you from knowing Christ, and seeing His great salvation—from giving yourselves up to Him, and obtaining from Him this living water? It may be harmless—it may be innocent in itself—it may even be praiseworthy in itself. But has it been of sufficient weight with you to keep you from Christ? Is He a stranger to you? and are you a stranger to His great gifts? Is there anything even this day—no matter what—family duties, lawful employments—which has held you? Perhaps something less harmless and innocent than a waterpot has been found hitherto of sufficient weight with you to keep your soul dead to the spiritual apprehension of Christ's words. See yourself then in the case of this woman, as far as we have yet considered it. Her mind was occupied in the purpose for which she came to the well—a lawful and necessary purpose; and so she had no mind for the things of Christ. She saw nothing in them but what related to her then employment; she saw not the love, the graciousness, and compassion of the Lord's mind just going to be openly manifested towards her. There was the Lord of life and glory, weary with His journey, at the well, while His soul was full of thoughts of reconciliation towards her. But she saw it not; she thought more about her waterpot; it was greater in her estimation than the living water He had been speaking of. Still pursuing her own carnal train of thought, she continued, "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?" Jesus answered her, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall

thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Now one would have thought that such a powerful truth, from the lips of Truth itself, would have awakened her from her stupid dream, and shewn her that there was more in it than carnal nature could discern. But no; she saw nothing of it, and replies, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." The natural mind is on natural things, and sees everything through that medium; it is shut up in its own little circle of feelings and ideas, and can neither see nor feel beyond it; there it looks for all its enjoyment; there it lives, there it continues, and there it dies. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned"; and the reason is this—they have neither seen nor know the God in whose presence they are, neither have they ever been partakers by faith in Christ of God's gift of the Holy Spirit, whereby they discern spiritually; they have no perception of the excluded state in which they are with regard to God and heaven; neither do they know anything of the entrance into the new life—the new creation, because the entrance of the Spirit has never been experienced in their hearts, they are foolish and worldly and know nothing of God.

But notwithstanding all this we see the perseverance of our God. In spite of all the stupidity of this sinful Samaritan, the Lord still continues His labour of love, though exhibited differently. He now changes His manner. But the patience of the Lord of love is never wearied by the obstinate perverseness of His people.

We, judging from our own feelings, might well suppose the Saviour would have left her in dark stupidity, and have given her up. But no; He is God, and not man: therefore we are not left to our own blindness. The patience of His love is never exhausted, for it proceeds from an inexhaustible source: “God is love.”

The Saviour now takes another course in His wisdom; but the end is still the same—love. He had tried expostulation and entreaty, but she could not understand Him. He therefore says, “Go, call thy husband”; you are proof against all I have offered you; you cannot understand My motive and My meaning of love, so I must make you get a view of yourself—of your ruin—of your utter wretchedness. In this one sentence her little world of iniquity was unravelled to her mind. He brought her to the consciousness of what she was, and to the knowledge of what He was. She answers, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.” The secrets of her heart and life were laid open to her by One whom she had never seen before. The Lord struck the chord to the conscience of the sinner—it vibrated. The Stranger convinced her of what she never before in reality believed—that she was a sinner. He laid open what she had so carefully concealed, stripped her of her self-disguise, and shewed her that He was acquainted with the hidden recesses of her heart. And such ever follows the testimony of the truth, when brought home with power to the soul of the sinner. “He is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.” And it is thus the Lord acts generally, before we come to the distinct apprehension that we are in the presence of

One who has the keys of our conscience, and knows the secrets of our hearts, in whose hands we cannot struggle or wrestle for relief; we are judged, we are convinced, we are dumb before Him; we feel His power, and are constrained to cry, “Come, see a man that told me all that ever I did.” Even while there is no manifest perception of the blessing offered, yet the soul is brought to see and feel the power of Him with whom it has to do; that He who searches the heart and finds out our sin comes in the power of God, and that it is vain for us to dissemble with Him.

Her mind is now taken off from her waterpot, and she inquires where she was to worship God. Much might be said of the reply here given to her on the worship God alone requires—spiritual worship. The whole instruction of God’s Spirit as to communion with Him is brought out here. But we pass on to the consideration of the blessed end of their converse. Her mind was now opening to the light. She was approaching to the knowledge of Him, whom to know is everlasting life, and she appears looking forward to the time when the Redeemer is to reveal himself. The Spirit leads her to say, “I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.”

Now trace these steps, brethren, and you will see the perfect blessedness and graciousness of the way in which she was brought to know Christ. Though a vile sinner, stupid and heedless of the wonderful blessings He was holding out to her, not one word of anger, not one word of reproach, passes the Lord’s lips. He brought her sin to her remembrance— “Thou hast well said, I have no husband.” He leads her to desire the revelation

of the Messiah, and then, in a way the most engaging and the most insinuating, He makes Himself known unto her. There is not one of us, if the Lord were thus to unveil our minds, but would be ready to fly from ourselves and seek Jesus. But we see not our state by nature; we are too busy—too much occupied with the cares, duties, engagements, and pleasures of the world, to see ourselves as we really are. We are too much occupied with our waterpot to know the Lord of glory seated at the well. But let the truth be brought to ourselves, then even the world, self-lover as it is, will hate itself. In what a way of love was she brought! no reproach, no harshness, no unkind word. He simply opens up her heart, next creates the desire to know Him, and then exclaims, “I that speak unto thee am he.” Here she now found what her soul was looking for. She might have some possible hope that He was coming; but how could she expect to see Him so full of humility and love as to become a suitor for a drink of cold water? This is the very way and manner in which Christ reveals Himself to any soul before that soul asks anything of Him. It is in this very position that we are able to ask anything of Him. It is in this way of dealing that we find Christ in all gentleness, all love, all condescension to our weakness and unworthiness. He shews us something of the greatness of His power in knowing our hearts; and then leads us to the point of blessedness when He reveals Himself— “I am he.” The sinner can then ask from the Lord, whom he has seen willing to be a debtor for kindness; he hears Him exclaim, I do not feel at enmity with you; I am not about to reproach you; and to shew you this, I will entreat a favour at your hands, and am ready to give you what you shall ask of Me—the best gift—the gift of God.

Here, then, is what we have to look for—to know Christ, that we may obtain the gift of God. We find here that the Spirit is given to them that believe in Him. “If thou knewest… who it is that saith to thee, … thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water”; He would have given a well, put it in thee, which would ever be springing up. Thus the Lord acts now. When the soul is proof (so to speak) against the blessed invitations held out, the Lord sends the word of conviction. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, goes forth, and brings the soul to see its real position—that it is depraved, lost; that it cannot stand sinless before the face of God. “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet”; “He told me all things that ever I did”; is the experience of the heart, when He has thus wrought conviction in the soul. He teaches us what we could not know before— that we are in the presence of God, and that it is Jesus Himself who is talking with us. Then we come to Him, and He gives us the blessed gift which He intended for us all along.

Then we come to be taken out of our former position, as strangers, aliens, enemies, and are associated in our new position; no longer a worldly but a heavenly portion —Christ’s portion. The Spirit is given to testify of this; to shew that the life which he now lives is the life of Christ, setting the Christian in the same position as Christ Himself. And what follows? what are its effects here? “The woman then left her waterpot,” and reported it to all she met with, entreating them likewise to come to Jesus. And this effect will ever follow the clear perception of Christ to the soul—the total leaving of what before the carnal mind was centred in. She came for water. This was all she wanted then; her mind was on

that one thing. But soon she thought not of well, water, or waterpot. Her mind had centred in another object, and towards that she was now carried. Christ had revealed Himself to her soul; the Messiah's glory was now her aim and end. She knows Him now, not from hearsay but in the personal revelation of Himself; and immediately she begins to preach Him to others. A total revolution had taken place; things are now all put in their right places. We see order, where all before was disorder or chaos. We come to see Him, who is the life, as our life. For whoever has thus seen the Lord, asking at our hands, being willing to be dependent, as it were, on us—where this really has been seen, there the revolution has been total: the soul is led to inquire, Am I indeed in Him? am I associated with Him in interest, in privilege, in glory? Is He my life? Then what is the world to me? What have I to live for, but for His glory, and to shew my gratitude for His unspeakable mercies!

To bring the soul into this state was just the subject of those thoughts which occupied the Saviour's mind from the beginning, and throughout the whole process, of this woman's self-conviction and shame. A new life is thus given; the soul is quickened; a well of water is put within us. There is then a something in the soul which, always springing up, has always the power of refreshment, tending to whence it came—the living fountains of water —Christ Jesus; tending towards the glory of the Lord Jesus, and receiving all its glory from thence. Under the full recognition and sensible perception of this the world is of little worth; wealth is despised, power is despised, distinction is despised; the soul finds no wealth but in Christ, no power but by Christ, no distinction but from Him. So far as this power of perception is in us, in so far

will our joy be full; it springs up from the divine nature within us, which tends to its glorious giver, Christ. It is a fresh spring; it draws from the Lord of glory; it has fellowship and its associations are all with Him.

Now how is it with your souls? Is there this well within you, which is ever springing up, meeting its source? If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that asketh thee, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water. Of His giving there is not a shadow of a doubt: if thou hadst asked, He would have given thee. Have you known Christ? Have you asked of Him? Have you within you this well? Is it springing up within you? There is a vast difference between drawing from others, and having it ourselves. Could a thirsty soul receive benefit from what it found in you, except it had experienced the refreshment within itself? If you have experienced it yourself, what practical influence has it had? Are you separated from the world, and separated to God? Do you consider what is your high calling? — heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ! Are you imitating Him? What was He here? Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Are you such? If you are Christ's, His Spirit has borne witness in your heart that He was such, and that He manifests this to you, "that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." The glory of the Lord is manifested now in the power of God's Spirit on the souls of His people. This distinguishes them internally from all the world. They have come out from a participation in position with the first Adam, and are consequently partakers of a divine nature; they become altogether a part and portion of the last Adam, and are risen with Him. This they are called upon to manifest outwardly. Did you know one tittle of

the love of God in Christ—had you seen Him, and asked from Him what He presses on your reception, it would be your desire, aim, and delight to exhibit it. Dear friends, is there in you this spring—this well of water? If not, you have not known as yet the gift of God. Be not deceived, my friends; if you have not this in you, you have nothing. If you have not the inward refreshing spring, which Christ gives to all His people, you will find whatever else you have of little—of no—avail; for when the sun of temptation, of trial, or of affliction comes, that which is in you will be dried up as a useless pool without spring, without any refreshing source.

The Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

There are just two classes of characters which we meet with in the world: first, those who have never heard the way of truth and salvation, and in consequence are not manifestly interested in it; and, secondly, those who have heard and professed to receive it. But the principles of the latter individually are very different.

The general character of the one part is summed up in the charge brought from scripture— “they profess that they know God, while in works they deny him”; while the others are really and in truth waiting for His Son from heaven and the kingdom of God. This is what they desire visibly to behold, as is declared in John 3:3, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”; and to be brought into it—as in verse 5, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The perception therefore of this kingdom, and the entrance therein, arise manifestly from their being “born again.”

Many are inclined to look upon the new birth, which is here referred to, as a change of views, desires, and sentiments only. It is a change, if indeed that can be called a change which is an entirely new creation; as it is written, “created anew in Christ Jesus”; it is a “translation” — “hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” —a transferring, a putting into a different position, which the Gospel of Matthew strikingly brings before us.

The Lord Jesus is represented in different points of view by all the evangelists; and the reason the Holy Ghost has been thus pleased to exhibit Him is for the manifestation and furtherance of the Saviour's glory; for He fills up every blessing—all the greatness, wisdom, love, and power of the eternal Godhead are unfolded in Him. In Him dwells all blessedness, and from Him it is communicated; and the believer, who has found and known Him, finds Him to be such; his delight is in setting his mind on Christ; he feels and rejoices in his identification with Him in all things, and in his oneness with Him. Christ is his centre of attraction, and he is revolving round Him as the object of supreme delight.

Now the Gospel of John presents Christ to our view as the Son, and delineates all His offices and works as such, having authority, and exercising it as the Son. Luke displays Him as the last Adam—the Lord from heaven—tracing His genealogy, not downwards as Matthew, but ascending to the great original thus, "which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God," going about doing good continually and accomplishing all righteousness. And in Matthew we have Him exhibited as the Messiah, the object of the prophecies, the substance of the shadows and types of the Jewish ritual: and as He was the looked-for seed, typified of old, and promised to Abraham and David as their seed, so we have in this Gospel His descent from Abraham and David according to the flesh. But the mention of the kingdom of heaven is peculiar to this evangelist. In chapter 13 we have it much noticed: "To you it is given," said Jesus, speaking to His disciples, "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."

Now the disciples, in common with the whole Jewish nation, fully expected an earthly kingdom; but, as they had entirely overlooked those prophecies which foretold Christ's coming in humiliation, they were bewildered; and therefore this subject with which the Lord engrossed their minds just met their necessities; shewing them how the kingdom in mystery would be set up during the absence of their rejected Lord.

Now the period of the kingdom here referred to must be looked upon as the time of the development of the purposes of God, from His rejection by the world in the Person of His Son, to Christ's coming again in glory, when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father—a kingdom into which they are admitted, and none else. And this shews us the complete, entire disunion and dissociation of the children of God with the world.

What is the position of the world as it now stands? What is its natural positive position? It is in a state, not merely of hostility against God—not merely in its standing chargeable with alienation from all holiness, of open rebellion and outrage —but in a state of absolute exclusion from the presence of God, absolutely and definitely excluded from God's presence.

The word of God says, "He drove out the man." He had lost his innocence and purity, and was no longer fit to live in an innocent world. A plain precept had been given, and wilfully, in defiance of God, broken. The matter of fact as to eating the fruit was simple, but involved momentous consequences. Even the fact of its abstract littleness heightened the culpability of the offence; the action, looked at in itself, was trivial, and

yet it was the extent of every possible indignity which, under existing circumstances, could be offered to the majesty of heaven. The less the motive and inducement to sin, the greater is the guilt of it. Such however was man's depravity; and the world, as we now see it, is the result of such sin. Man sinned, and God drove out the man, because in his then state he could not dwell in His presence; "and he placed at the east of the garden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

In this excluded state is the world with which we are conversant—full of toil, sorrow, sin, and misery. But the evil was not of God, it did not originate in Him—this was not God's doing. But after this delinquency and exclusion was there no reaction—no return to purity? No!—the world was never again to be an innocent world; what had once become radically guilty could never again become radically pure; the very source of innocence, being once defiled, could not by any possibility become again holy. Innocence, once lost, is lost for ever. Man could do nothing. God would indeed come to put away sin; but how? By the sacrifice of His own dear Son, bringing in a new dispensation of unbounded mercy, and setting up a kingdom, and gathering out of the world the subjects of this new dispensation.

The world had sinned, but was not left there. God manifested Himself, and made known His purposes; first, to Adam, when He called him— "Where art thou?" and brought his sin before him; then in the calling out of the world, and preserving Noah, the type of the church, after the flood; His calling of Abraham and the Jewish nation, giving laws, and exhibiting Himself in types and ceremonies as the object of the believer's faith. At

length, when all these displays of superlative love had but more glaringly manifested the total enmity of man's mind, the Lord sent His Son: "I will send my beloved Son; it may be they will reverence him."

In this stage of the world we behold man, as it were, in a fresh position of more determined enmity and fiercer malignity, in league with Satan, and full of deadly animosity. The world's feeling now is, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him." And when was this foul principle exhibited? When the Lord comes in sympathetic mercy to meet the wants and bear away the sins of His people. It was then they declared they would not have Him. When He comes to reconcile, and to display the tenderness of His sympathetic love, then nothing would do but they must get rid of God. When He comes into the very midst of the sufferings and woes of a world lying in wickedness, they refuse to have Him. He was God, and therefore (as far as man could do it) they turned Him out of the world.

Now in this last act of man we do not see simply rebellion, or even defiance, but absolute rejection of God. They used the opportunity of His humiliation to heap indignity and scorn upon Him; and at length, as far as they were concerned, drove Him out of the world in which we are now dwelling. "We will not have this man to reign over use" is practically its determination.

Now believers are associated, in thought, feeling, affection, and interest, with Him who is the object of the world's determined enmity; they are subjects of another kingdom and another King; the King whom the world will not have to reign over them is the King they own and serve. They see that the world which surrounds

them is a judged world; that it has been convicted of rejecting all right and truth; as our Lord Himself says, “Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” The judgment was passed when Christ exclaimed, “It is finished”; in the very act of His crucifixion was their judgment sealed. The most determined and inveterate enmity of man against God was at its height on the cross of Christ; man’s malice could go no farther, and God’s love was there also manifested in the highest degree. Sin abounded, but love much more abounded; the very act which exhibited enmity of the deepest dye on man’s part opened the highest love on God’s. Here they met, as it were, in a centre—at a point, each drawn to the greatest possible extent; and here love obtained the victory, triumphed over sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness.

And this judgment of the world is known to all believers; yea, the Holy Ghost Himself convinces them of it. “When the Comforter is come, he shall reprove [or convince] the world of sin,” said Christ; “of righteousness, and of judgment … because the prince of this world is judged.” So that they are convinced they lived in a judged world, a world found guilty of, and condemned for, rejecting God, but on which sentence has not as yet been executed. It is now just in the position between sentence having been passed and the final execution.

In the very act which thus displays man’s rage the believer sees also his own perfect acceptance; that God, in whom he delights, and in whom he rests, has risen in mercy above man’s depravity and triumphed in love over the bitterest hatred. The summit of malevolence the most abominable, when the Saviour’s side was pierced, was met by a tide of blood and of water, to sanctify and

to purify the unclean: this is the glory, the blessedness, of the child of God.

But from the parable before us of the ten virgins we necessarily perceive that there are those who, though associated with the people of God in profession and outwardly appearing to belong to them, are not in reality alive to God. They appear to be looking for His coming, but they are not longing to behold Him or to go in with Him to the marriage. It is not the earnest desire of their hearts to behold Him as He is; their souls have not gone forth, crying, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. They more resemble those servants who exclaimed, “My Lord delayeth his coming,” and then followed on in their own pleasure. But they know not the delight, the joy, the heavenly happiness of waiting in longing expectation to see His face, and dwell with Him for ever!

But we have in this account of the ten virgins an evidence of the extent to which even outward profession may go. Though there were but five wise, yet they all went forth to meet the bridegroom—yes, ostensibly for the same purpose, they all “went forth.” They were alike in companionship; they had all the lamps of profession. In what then did they differ? In this: they had not just the one thing, the only thing, that fitted them to receive the bridegroom. They were without the light wherewith to usher in the Lord; they wanted the very thing which alone could make them suitable companions for the Master; namely, the participation of the divine nature, the impartation of light, the indwelling of God the Holy Ghost. They wanted the fixedness of the affections wrought in the soul by the oil of gladness, the unction of the Spirit, which filled the souls of the wise virgins, and which waited but for the appearance of the bridegroom

to emanate in a flame of glory. This was what they wanted; this is what the believer has; and this it is that makes the mighty difference between him and the world.

“At midnight the cry came”: the heavenly virgins arose. Though conscious of much weakness in themselves, they rise at the cry of their beloved; for there is that in them which answers to the cry. The foolish virgins trimmed their lamps; but their lamps failed to burn! And is there no remedy then? None! According to the Saviour’s awful declaration: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.”

Here finishes the total distinction between the tares and the wheat. Now it is openly seen that their objects, hopes, and associations were totally different—opposite and irreconcilable. One is of the world, the other of God; one is quickened by Christ, the other is reserved to be burned. “Bind the tares in bundles, and burn them; but gather the wheat into my garner.”

And why are the wheat still spared, but as witnesses of the grace of our Lord; to display to the world the image of Him, whose they are, and whom they serve; to manifest the inseparable union existing between them and their glorious Head, as He said Himself, “that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me”?

And are you, believers, thus distinguished in the midst of a world judged guilty of the crime of rejecting the Lord of glory, and turning Him out of the world? You are walking in a condemned world, on which sentence has been passed, but the execution of it is still averted, until the last of Christ’s saints is gathered into the garner. Are

you conscious of this, and yet are you, can you, be living in association of pursuits, feelings, desires, or appearance with them? The believer's delight is the Lord's glory. Where is the Lord's glory—in an association in any way with His enemies? No. The saint that looks with delight to his Lord's coming is one with Him in feeling and desire—the Lord's will is his. Now do you contemplate the time when He will come to receive you to Himself and when subsequently all that offends Him shall be swept away, and His own shall reign with Him? Can you contemplate with delight that period, when all that oppose the truth of God, everything that you now behold belonging to the world, shall be destroyed by the brightness of His coming, shall be consumed by the breath of His mouth? All things that offend shall no longer dwell there.

This is the saint's whole delight; this is what he is looking and longing for, and hastening unto, namely, the coming of the Lord. Is this your personal desire? Is this your habitual experience? Then are you crying, Tarry not; come, Lord Jesus: even so, Amen? Then are you aiming at greater meetness for your heavenly Master and Bridegroom? and are you trimming your lamps to have them in readiness to meet and light your Lord when He shall appear?

Let this be your desire, your joy, your delight: that you may be found watching and waiting to go in unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The Living Water

John 7:37-39

In order fully to understand the meaning of this scripture, and the circumstance for which this feast, to which Jesus went up, is a type, we must, in the first place, see the way in which He is presented to us in Scripture—at present as an absent Lord. Under an anticipated sense of this absence we find Him comforting His disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me”; consequent upon that discourse with His disciples, wherein He says, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards.” And when Peter under a dread of that absence, exclaimed, “Lord, why, cannot I follow thee now?” Jesus says, “Let not your heart be troubled.” You shall not enjoy My bodily presence, it is true; but, though absent, believe in Me. Ye believe in God without seeing Him; now believe also in Me: though I go away from you, I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man takes from you. Here, then, is now the position of the believer. Jesus has gone, and the believer stands in the apprehension of His absence; his desires are tending toward an absent Lord. He feels his joy still incomplete, because his Beloved is not present; and he is looking for and hastening towards the time when He is to be revealed, and we shall “see him as he is.” But he knows at present he is not where Christ is; he is in a usurped world, where Satan is setting up his kingdom, whose subjects are described as saying, “I sit as queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” Here is nothing of

the consciousness of the Lord's absence as felt by the church—no cry for deliverance—no cry for the Lord to come; no such thing as saying, "In this [body] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven."

Here we have the character of those who are members of Christ's body. They are such as have an habitual consciousness that their Lord is absent, that the adversary is present, and that they themselves are in a world which rejected their Lord and is under the usurped dominion of their adversary. Hence they are looking for "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." And they are believers, who are not looking to receive their portion here from the persons and things of this world. Theirs is an "inheritance reserved" for them, the earnest of which they now receive, not by sight, but by faith— "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." They experience troubles and trials here, "which are not joyous, but grievous"; but they have the blessed consciousness of the love of the Father brought to them by His well-beloved Son, and of which they partake, through the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

There are two cities referred to in Scripture. Paul says, in the name of all believers, "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." And believers are conscious that they are where the "city is low in a low place." The other city is "the city of confusion," or Babylon, which are synonymous terms; this is quite distinct from that city which we seek. The city of confusion, or Babel, cannot then bear any analogy to this city: they are not—they cannot be—united. They are

the two opposite corporate systems, irrespective of each other, and opposed to each other.

There is this testimony of the Spirit in the hearts of believers, that, though surrounded with “Great Babylon,” it is not the city to the laws of which they owe or practise obedience; that their city is the “city of God” —the manifestation of which they are looking for.

The believer is conscious that, if he is living bodily in this “city of confusion,” he has really by the Spirit “come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God.” It is to this he belongs; of this city he is a citizen, and for the visible perception of this he is hastening onwards. The Spirit testifies that he has now the visible perception of the other system, dwelling there, but not as belonging to it; but as waiting for that time when “he that shall come will come and will not tarry,” who will then overthrow the dominion of Satan, and reign for ever!

But, besides the absence of the Lord, which this scripture infers, it also evidences the presence of the Holy Ghost with such as do groan under a sense of widowhood (that is, while they are in the wilderness, before coming to the land of Canaan), and particularly points to the latter times, just previous to the coming of Christ, when the outpouring of the Spirit should be peculiarly manifested.

To the understanding of this, it is necessary for us to review the statements of the circumstances in which our Lord was placed at this time. The Jews were coming up to the feast of tabernacles at Jerusalem. “Jesus was in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him”; and for this reason, because He had

healed the impotent man, who for thirty-eight years had vainly looked for a cure from the pool of Bethesda—which, like the law, good and salutary in itself, was perfectly useless to him by reason of his inability to use it, his own infirmity entirely disabling him from any hope of cure from it. And so he must ever have remained, had not the Lord passed by and with a word of power commanded him to live. This called forth the envious malice of the Lord's enemies; and, until He appeared at the feast, He had been still in Galilee.

The feast of tabernacles had not been, nor could it be, kept in the wilderness; and it is one of the remarkable types which manifestly have not yet been fulfilled. This was the third of the three great annual feasts which the Jews held in commemoration of some great event. The time when this was first kept was after their entering into the land of Canaan. The very circumstances of it shewed that it could not be kept in the wilderness. It was to continue for seven days, and also on the eighth day, which was to be a great sabbath. It was to be kept in memorial that they had dwelt in tents; that they had been in the wilderness but were now out of it. It was a day of solemn assembly—the ingathering, the acknowledgment that, though they had been "strangers and pilgrims," or wanderers in a foreign country, yet now they were settled in the land whither they had been journeying all the time they had been in the wilderness; and therefore we see that this is still an unfulfilled type in the Christian dispensation; for real facts testify, that as the feast of tabernacles could not be kept until they had come out of the wilderness state, it is still to us an unfulfilled type, and that the third great type, which was

to witness the gathering of the people to their own land, waits for its final accomplishment.

The feast of the passover, which commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage by the slaying of the lamb and the sprinkling of blood, and prefigured the redemption of the church by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been accomplished, as far as the absolute fact of His death and satisfaction for sin, in raising us from more than Egyptian bondage. The results have not indeed, nor will they be, fully accomplished, till the last redeemed sinner is in glory. But the positive fact demonstrably proves that it has had a definite fulfilment.

The feast of weeks, or Pentecost, an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord for the increase of the firstfruits of the harvest, has had, so far as the absolute fact, a plain fulfilment, when the first-fruits of the Christian church were seen—the manifestation of the increase of the Spirit in His descent on the disciples on the day of Pentecost—the first-fruits of the finished work of Christ. Here it has been in part fulfilled. The results have not all been accomplished; the effects are still going and will continue to go on, though it has had in some measure its positive and ostensible accomplishment. But in no sense has the type of the feast of tabernacles been fulfilled; it remains yet to be accomplished, when the true Israelites, having left the wilderness, are brought into their own land, and commemorate with loud praises their blessed entrance.

The circumstances which occurred at these feasts prove also the fact of their fulfilment. In the time of the passover, and the feast accompanying it, there was to be

offered a lamb, without blemish or spot, and on the morrow after the sabbath an unbroken offering, a sheaf of the first-fruits, exactly answering to Christ's sacrifice of Himself, as a lamb without any blemish, and presenting at His resurrection an unbroken offering—"the first-fruits of them that slept."

Now, at the feast of Pentecost, an offering was made of two wave loaves, mixed with leaven: and in the fulfilment of this type we see the wonderful contrast between it and that offered on the day of atonement. The Spirit descended on the disciples in the realisation of this figure; but, the excellency being put into earthen vessels, it was leavened; that is, it was mixed with the corruption of nature—therefore, a leavened cake. Whereas, in the former type, it was not a leavened but an unleavened offering, a sheaf of the first-fruits; wonderfully prefiguring the offering of Him, who had no stain or spot of sin, who saw no corruption, and in whom there was no leaven mixed.

Now there would have been no atonement had the paschal lamb been in any way blemished; but being faultless and then sacrificed, it was accepted, in that it was without blemish.

The feast of tabernacles, which is yet to be commemorated, was to be held in the land of Canaan, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when the fruit of the land was gathered in. It was after the harvest and vintage were over; which shews that, as yet, it could not have its fulfilment, but waits for it in the closing scene, when the saints "shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air," having "put on their house which is from heaven," that is, their resurrection bodies.

And then shall come the time of gladness, of rest, and of fulness, to the church now free from all her enemies.

But now, concerning the Lord's going up to this feast of tabernacles which was at hand, and which was confessedly an unfulfilled type, His brethren said to Him, "Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world."

This was pressed upon Him by His brethren, who did not believe on Him: "Shew thyself to the world" —exhibit Thyself. They wanted a manifestation of Himself at that time, adequate to the claims He made; an indiscriminate revelation of Himself to all the world, proposing to Him to shew Himself then. But Jesus said, "My time is not yet come." That was not His time to exhibit Himself openly; but the time is fast approaching, which will be to the joy of His saints, and the terror of the ungodly. Then will He exhibit Himself, when "every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." This will be the time when He shall declare Himself openly. But as yet He has not come to confound the world by the manifestation of Himself openly; and this, to a world lying in wickedness, is mercy—real longsuffering—the very height of forbearance; for when He does come, it is to thrust out of His dominion all that offend, all that do iniquity—all that practise or love sin: and why? Because He is holiness itself, and He cannot look at sin; and where He is, sin cannot find a place. And therefore His very coming must sweep, with the besom

of destruction, all the refuges of lies, and everything that is opposed to holiness. This forbearance therefore is comparative happiness. And well it is for the saints now, that the Lord did not act on the suggestion of His brethren, and shew Himself then. Well it is for them that it was not His time. The Lord's long-suffering was their salvation: otherwise they never would have been gathered out, and translated into another kingdom; nor would they who are yet to be gathered out still see Him waiting to be gracious, entreating them to come unto Him to be saved; they would never have heard that the Lord went up, as He did at this feast, and proclaimed, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

Blessed, very blessed is it, then, for the world, for the saints, and for those who are yet to be gathered in, that the Lord did not shew Himself openly at the feast, "because his time was not yet come." He went up however, but secretly. His very discourse— "I go not up yet to this feast"—shewed that it was to have a positive fulfilment, when there would be a consciousness of having been in the wilderness, but now rejoicing in being out of it. "Shew thyself to the world" was the request of His brethren. This He refused; but He went up secretly, and taught at the feast, inviting all to come and partake of His mercy, before He should disclose Himself openly.

In consequence of the effect the Lord's miracles had made upon the people, the Pharisees were enraged, and sent officers to take Him; and the Lord says, "Yet a little while am I with you." There is a peculiar display of affection in this, as if He would call upon them, while they have the light, to believe in it, to walk in it, and so be saved. And He adds, "Ye shall seek me, and shall not

find me." There is a time coming when you will be glad to find me; you now seek me in ill-will, in enmity, in malice, but the time will come when you will endeavour to find me from a very different motive. And He says precisely the same to His disciples, "Ye shall seek me, and, as I said unto the Jews, whither I go, ye cannot come." Such, therefore, is the present position of the people of God: they are where Christ manifestly is not; and where He is, there they cannot come as yet. It is painfully true, it is sorrowfully true, that this is their experience low. They are not with Jesus, though the Lord in mercy makes it up to them; by the earnest of it which He puts within them, they have the certainty that they shall be with Him. This is the desire of their souls; this constitutes their hope of glory, to be in the presence of Christ; to see "him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood"; to "see him as he is," and "to be like him."

This is what we are looking for, if we are believers. We have, it is true, while here, another Comforter, a blessed Comforter; but His very teaching and instruction leads us to desire more of Him, and more of the Father, and of Jesus; and He sends forth our affections towards Jesus, and leads us to desire His presence; just as here, with sensible objects, where we really love, we are longing to be in the presence of the object; so, the indwelling of the Spirit, who is love, draws out our affections towards Jesus, making us practically and painfully conscious of the present truth of Christ's words, "Whither I go, ye cannot come."

Now, brethren, I ask you, Have you come to the sorrowful acknowledgment and perception of Christ's words? Are you conscious that you are in a distinct

position from the present system of things in this “city of confusion,” and that you are opposed to it in affections, desires, and pursuits? That your affections are carried away to Him who has departed: Him whom the world rejected—Him whom the world turned out, and left itself in the darkness which it loved? Are you conscious that the night is far spent? that the day, the glorious day of His appearing, is at hand?

We, brethren, are not of the night, nor of darkness. But are we walking as children of the light, and of the day? We know it is the night now, because the “Sun of righteousness” is absent. His glory is hid, and His beams are seen obscurely even by the keenest spiritual vision. But are our desires intensely turned towards the returning light? Are we waiting for it “more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning”?

The question with our souls, brethren, is, whether there is this apprehension—this spiritual apprehension, of what the Lord Jesus is to the soul, so as to be sensible of our state at present, as living on an absent Lord? “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world,” said Christ. Christ, our light, is not visible with us, but He is coming; the day-star may be hid till the day-dawn appears, but then shall “the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”

This is what the believer is hastening towards; he is longing for the day—the night is not his joy—it is not his happiness. “They that sleen, sleep in the night”; but he is not of the night, and therefore can get no enjoyment from the things of the night. But he waits for the day-star—Him who, though He has hitherto refrained from

openly manifesting Himself to the world, yet has revealed Himself in the hearts of His people, causing them to delight, to glory in, and to love, an absent Lord, more than all sensible and present objects, delights, and enjoyments. And in this position is the believer set at present, waiting for the glory, of which he has the earnest in his soul: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.”

This great feast to which the Lord was going up was very memorable to the Jews from the several times of its celebration. At the time of the completion of Solomon’s temple, when nothing more was wanting to finish it—at that same time was the feast of the seventh month— “a solemn assembly,” in which the people were “joyful and glad of heart.” Also, on the return of the captives from Babylon into their own land, they discovered by the book of the law that it was the exact period when this feast should be observed; and we find in Nehemiah 8, that it was celebrated with “very great gladness.”

For the type to be fulfilled literally and spiritually we must look forward to that time when the spiritual temple will be completed; when every precious stone shall be placed therein, and when “he shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it”; and also for that time, when there shall be nothing to keep us from our own home, and when our souls shall be filled with joy and gladness and thanksgiving on getting up out of the wilderness. But we are not yet there; and therefore the Lord has prepared, and wonderfully given, that which is to be the very comfort and stay of our souls while in this wilderness: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” Before this is set up in a believer, he has

no refreshing perception of union with the living fountain. What refreshed the children of Israel during their long and toilsome marches through the wilderness? The command of God went forth to Moses, and upon striking the rock the waters flowed, “the rivers ran in dry places “; they found living waters even in the wilderness. This was to satisfy them until they came to the desired land. And so the Lord Jesus was smitten; and from that Rock flow all the living streams which are given for the refreshment and strengthening of His people while here.

Now however sad it is that our Lord is absent from you, still, while you are here resting on the smitten rock for support and comfort, your wants can always be supplied. Christ can cause you to overflow with the spiritual apprehension of His refreshing grace. He will make you so one with Himself, that the fountain, the inexhaustible fountain which He contains, shall be so indwelling in you, as to be ever flowing, ever streaming, even in the wilderness; not keeping in, but flowing out in joyful acknowledgments of spiritual refreshment. It was this that Christ promised He would give after His departure: “This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” It is thus that Jesus makes His people partakers of His fulness even here. It is true, they have not all the joy; but when the wilderness shall be left behind, then will they enter into all the joy of the Lord. In the meanwhile the Holy Spirit, who makes them conscious that they are still not in the land of rest, fills them with all that can compensate for its wants while here below, in causing,

by His indwelling, “rivers of living water” to flow forth: this is the joy of the Holy Ghost.

In order that the presence of God the Holy Ghost should be thus experienced, Christ absented Himself for a time from His own. “It is expedient for you,” said He, “that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you”; you knew Him when absent, but you shall shortly have Him dwelling in you, so as to cause you to flow forth in living water. This was the promise He gave on the last day of the feast—the promise of the Holy Ghost, which “they that believe on him should receive”; given now, as a witness to the ascension of Christ, after having accomplished redemption work (for it is said, “The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified”) after He had entered into His rest of eternal glory; which, though it has been confounded with that given at the new birth, is nevertheless perfectly distinct from it. For Paul clearly states this to the Galatians, when he says, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts”; not to make, but because ye are sons already. Therefore, you should enjoy present fellowship with the Father and the Son in glory, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, whose powerful presence would lead the soul to the enjoyment of the unseen realities of glory which He testifies within; leading, also, to the contemplation of the Person, work, and offices of the Lord Jesus, as undertaken for our redemption—as the bearer and confessor of, and atonement for, sin; as “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person,” which was given them after they had believed; “in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of

promise," which was given, not to believe, but as an "earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

This was consequent upon Jesus being glorified— "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise": and it was not an influence externally, but was within them, dwelling in them: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you?" And His personality is also declared: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed."

There is a distinct mention of this, as of something more than had hitherto been experienced, which in the words of the text is expressly said to have been "not yet given"; and the reason assigned— "because that Jesus was not yet glorified." It was to be given to those that believed. This gift then is the seal of the Spirit, attesting Christ's finished work—His resurrection, ascension, and glorification—causing us to enter into the apprehension of those heavenly things which He reveals to us. The blessed Comforter was given for our refreshment in the wilderness.

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," to make known these great things by the indwelling of the Spirit in the hearts of us believers, enabling us to know Christ glorified; and, from His glory, sending down the Spirit of the Father in our hearts in attestation of it—who reveals all the glory from which He came. He comes as the gift of Christ from the Father, and gives us to know the fellowship and consolation of the Father's love, testifying our claim to this fellowship, in that we have been made sons. And though we know

not here the extent of the blessedness that awaits us, yet we know that, when Christ “shall appear, we shall be like him”; when we shall obtain the glory that is reserved for us.

These are the things which the Spirit makes known, even in the wilderness; all consequent upon the Father’s love. “Ye are no more servants, but sons”; and therefore hath He (the Father) “sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.” And, indeed, it is only in the position as sons that we can recognise anything of the love of the Father, or the union subsisting between us and Himself, as described in John 17, in the words of Jesus: “That the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” And again, “I have declared unto them thy name … that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

There is one great truth made known to us by the Spirit, that Christ was sent from the Father for the purpose, not only of saving sinners, of saving “the ungodly,” but of bringing them into His Father’s house, and unto the eternal favour of God—into the very blessedness with Himself in the Father’s love—” joint-heirs “with Himself in the glory, and like Him. “We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him.” The consummation of this will be seen in that day, when we are brought into the blessedness of manifested union with Christ; partakers with Him in the conscious enjoyment of the Father’s love, in the glory of Jesus—partakers of the same glory. “Father, I will,” said Jesus, “that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am”; “and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one.” Everything that Christ has, except and only His essential Godhead, is His people’s—

all that glory and blessedness is theirs. And very blessedly does the Holy Ghost enable those whom He teaches to have in present apprehension that that glory is there for them.

What fills the soul of a Christian with bitterness is the practical experience that he is not yet come up out of the wilderness—that he is not yet in the glory. But, to refresh and comfort him, the Lord gives him within himself while here those “living waters,” as in the wilderness of old; by virtue of their identity and oneness with Christ, who is the Rock, the waters necessarily flow from thence. “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” —rivers of blessedness flowing from his soul, as being united to the living fountain.

Could your hearts contain the thousandth part of that love which the Spirit could impart, your gratitude would overflow exceedingly, in the apprehension that, even in the desert, you have constantly within you a witness of the overflowing fulness of Christ’s love, the fulness of His fellowship, and the fulness of His joy.

But, brethren, when do we see any overflowing witness to the inward testimony of the fulness of Christ’s joy? Where are those who should be a separated people, unto the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord always? Where is the evidence that “we are not of the night, nor of darkness”? O let us testify that we are in a position of wondrous blessedness, even here, till that day comes when we shall know even as also we are known; and when not only Christ, as the first-fruits, shall enter into His glory, but, the harvest being past, the ingathering of all the saints shall be accomplished, and Christ’s glory and joy will then be full; for He shall appear in the midst, and

see of the “travail of his soul, and be satisfied”; for they shall all be there, and each will have entered “into the joy of his Lord.” Until the reality shall come, in what way should they act who are the “temple of the Holy Ghost”—of Him who is shewing them what will then take place? What practical use should they make of the knowledge of Him, who was smitten for them, that “rivers of living water” should flow from them?

Brethren, I would ask you, Are you grieving the Spirit? Are the things that you are occupied with such as would find a place amidst these living waters? Are your associations and desires capable of being assimilated with these pure streams, and together to flow unruffled and untainted? Or are its operations restrained by your assimilation to what opposes it?

Brethren, I would ask, Is there this joy occasioned by the indwelling of the Spirit within you, even under the consciousness of the Lord’s absence? And is the fountain within you flowing over at the contemplation of the near approach of your Lord? Or, sad to inquire, brethren, are you grieving the Spirit by indulging the flesh? Have you deprived yourselves of the comfortable perception of His overflowing fulness within you, by gratifying “the old man “—engaging in those things which the Spirit abhors —tempting Him to leave you low and barren? for where there is a cleaving to, and seeking of, the things of sense, it necessarily keeps us lifeless and languid, even sometimes as though there were no Spirit in us at all. Is there not, in some of you, a practical grieving of the Spirit? Are you conscious there is in you this fulness—this overflowing fulness—from the glorification of Christ? Why are you not conscious of it? Only because you are practically disowning Him. Hence the darkness,

the deadness, nay, the very doubtings, whether you are in the faith or no; and all this, by following the things of this world, which lead to darkness and cannot bear the light.

The Spirit is overflowing like “rivers of living water” from the soul of him in whom He has entered, flowing on all around: it may be on the good soil, or on the barren sand; but still His nature and power is ever to flow forth. Oh! brethren, we are losing much of the joy and consolation of this divine Spirit, by our own inconsistencies, and love of what grieves Him.

It is a solemn truth, dear friends, that “if you have not the Spirit of Christ, you are none of his.” And is it possible that, possessing Him, you can remain strangers to His mind, and not manifest your possession of this great gift? It is a sad and solemn but nevertheless a certain truth, that if you have not the Spirit, you are not manifestly Christ’s, and are yet in your sins.

Be not deceived. Christ says that, except a man be born again, he can neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God. See to it then, that ye seek to be made partakers of this gift, which is the promise of the Father. It is madness for you to think of getting to happiness in any other way. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth”; and when He has given you power to believe, He will be in you, as “a well of water springing up into everlasting life,” and rivers of living water ever flowing. Be persuaded, ere the day of the Lord’s vengeance comes, and you be consigned, with the tares and the workers of wickedness, into everlasting destruction.

God Speaking from Heaven

Hebrews 12:25

The apostle, in addressing this exhortation to the Hebrews, acted upon the ground of the character is which Christ spoke, and the consequences resulting therefrom. Observe: His character is specifically brought forward as speaking “from heaven,” contrasted with His character as speaking on earth: “If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth [that is, when He spake from mount Sinai, thundering out His righteous law], much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” —speaketh from the right hand of God, in the midst of His glory.

Here is the contrast: Christ, as speaking now from heaven, and then on earth; an awful warning to transgressors, by the evidence of what then happened, to effect much more: “Whose voice then shook the earth.” This having occurred sanctions the word spoken, which says, “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.” And those things, dear friends, are what the saint is in now—not of them, but in them. Therefore is he, thus surrounded, warned not to turn away from Him “that speaketh from heaven.”

This then is the ground on which he stands. On the one hand, he sees the full blessedness—the unqualified hope — which this voice, speaking from heaven, makes known to him; and, on the other hand, he sees there is nothing else to rest upon but the word of Jesus, which is perfectly stable in that it has been tried and proved. This

cannot be removed or shaken; everything, no matter what, that is not in association with this, being liable to be shaken, shall be removed. When the voice speaks from heaven for the removal of all that opposes it, all that is not of this heavenly character must go.

This same speaking then implies the deep blessedness of the believer, and his not having anything else to rest on but Jesus; not merely to rest on Jesus in the way of righteousness, but for all things—for everything; for all else is in opposition to God, and when the time of this speaking closes, all that is not of grace goes. “He then shook the earth.” Tremendous was the sight. The mount was all on fire, and there was a very great earthquake. This was calculated to inspire great terror. But here is manifested the blessedness of the child of God, he is not come to that: “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest … but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God,” etc.

Here we have the character of the dispensation to which we, as believers, are called; it is spoken nominally of all the professing church, though only true of those who are alive to God. They have come to this; their warrant is, that this voice has spoken to them from heaven, and that they have heard it, and that it is the voice of Jesus. Thus He is presented, as having entered into His glory, and from thence speaking.

Thus then we learn from this word that this same Jesus who spake on earth is now speaking from heaven. “Who is he that ascended but he also that descended first into the lower parts of the earth? “The Lord Jesus is speaking

specially, as having effected the entire accomplishment of all that His people failed in, and that could in any degree militate against their happiness. This voice tells us that it is the same Person, the same Christ who was humbled for our sins; who went through the world, weary and sorrowful 4 the same man who was crucified, dead, buried, raised, and ascended, that now speaks from heaven, as having passed through all these, and is now at the right hand of God, from whence He is inviting His people up thither.

This then is the joy of the child of God, when he hears this voice of Jesus addressing him from heaven, testifying of what He has done, and speaking as a witness of peace; speaking in the consciousness of having so overcome—so entirely to have borne the sin of His people as to set it aside for ever by the one sacrifice of Himself once offered. And in this position He speaks— I have set aside for ever the sin which kept you excluded from God; and I am entered into the rest and glory, as your representative, in the presence of the Father. When this voice is heard and known, we have peace.

When the Lord Jesus therefore speaks from heaven, He speaks of having accomplished all the work which the Father gave Him to do. He speaks in the consciousness of this; and He gives us the consciousness of the same in the power of the Spirit, when He visits us individually. He, the Redeemer— He who stood the bearer of sin— stood responsible for His people; and by His perfect satisfaction acquitted them entirely. Now He, having ascended, says, I have done; I tell you, as in the presence of the Father, the result of all the work I accomplished: I am now in the very glory to which I am about to bring you. Here is the voice with which He

speaks; and if ever He speaks from heaven to any soul now, it is just thus. The voice may be heard very indistinctly indeed; but that is just what the voice declares—that is the story which Jesus brings to the soul.

It is a tale of mercy, of boundless, inconceivable mercy. It may indeed, poor trembling soul, begin with a tale of thy sin. This is calculated to originate deep thoughts—deep searchings of heart; but the beginning and end is for peace— blessed peace! The voice still continues to speak; to say, those sins are gone—utterly put away, no more to incur God's wrath; no further requirement to satisfy for them: Jesus has done that. You may indeed have sorrow still as to this world; for you are in the very midst of that world which crucified and rejected Christ, the Lord of glory. You are still in that world which displayed its utter and total enmity, even in rejecting the Author of all blessedness. That the world did, and He triumphed over it. He was crucified by the world, and He returned to the Father. What brought Him there, but the total rejection of Him by the world? There He is now, and speaks. And what does this voice declare? Why, that He has no part with the things of the world. He does not own it. The world would not own Him when He came in humiliation, and now He will not own it when seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Christ is now speaking from heaven with the witness of His rejection on earth, but with the full recognition of having passed through it, and triumphed over its most inveterate malice. This constitutes the blessedness of God's people here; for they see a full salvation. Christ now speaking from heaven, who once spoke on earth, brings with it the certain evidence of the full

accomplishment of all He engaged for. Nay, more, by His thus speaking from heaven, we, as believers, are privileged to know all that we are come to, even here. For this voice says, “Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to an nnumerable company of angels, the general assembly; and to the church of the first-born, which are written in heaven; and to God the Judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling.

Here we have, not only the confidence of acceptance, but the entireness of deliverance; not only as having overcome, but the blessedness to which believers are privileged to come. Blessed indeed is the portion to which they are called! A salvation which is already finished for them—a present salvation! This voice speaks, not of something which occurred some time ago, or in a distant place; but, when brought with power into the soul, it shews the present realisation of these things. It brings the soul to say, I am come to these, because He is there. Thus faith brings near these things. This then is the conscious position of the believer when under the energy of the Holy Ghost—the total putting away of all that hindered and dissociated him from that intimate communion with God, to which he is united, and which it is his privilege to enjoy.

All this Jesus speaks from heaven, and therefore His voice is a voice of peace—peace under all circumstances. He speaks the same under all the variety of exercises and trials of this mortal life. We may be bowed down, and think hard things of ourselves: but there Jesus sits in the calmness of conscious victory, and

His words are only words of peace. Persecution, affliction, and woe, may speak from earth; yet the voice from heaven speaks nothing but peace. The voice of the Lord Jesus is a voice of peace and conscious rest. Whatever conflicts with this peace is not in or from Jesus.

This position of the Christian is his perfect identity in spirit with Jesus as He now is: “Bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh,” and therefore He can well sympathise with us. We may be tempted, harassed, oppressed; but, notwithstanding that, we are really come to “the things which cannot be shaken.” “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” This may indeed be but dimly seen here, but it is not less real, and it is known to be real, by the power of the Spirit dwelling in them that believe. They see the “old man,” in their weaknesses which they have crucified, and now are raised, according to the power of the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Christ, our Saviour, is a risen and ascended Saviour; and He now speaks from heaven, as a pledge that He is in the very place to which He will bring us, and where we shall behold Him.

Moreover He so pleased the very mind of God, having performed all His will, that therefore He can say, It is done— it is accomplished—it is finished for ever. Thus He now speaks from heaven one whole testimony of peace; it must necessarily be the voice of peace, bringing in the blessedness of the results of that which brought peace. It is only of peace then that He speaks, whether it is heard or not. As Paul says, “and came and preached peace to them which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.” Christ wrought sorrowfully, even to the death of the cross, to obtain this peace for His

people; and now He proclaims it. Man knew not peace while at enmity with his Maker; and so the Lord Jesus undertook the whole responsibility attaching to His people, and has overcome all impediments to obtain their peace. And this is the only way true peace can be obtained—this is what Jesus died to obtain, and, having obtained, now testifies to the truth and certainty of it. See then that your eyes are fixed on Him that speaks from heaven: else you never can obtain peace; for, in very deed, it is the word of God.

Christ now sits in heaven proclaiming peace, which brings before us the unspeakable blessedness of the manifestation of the prerogative of God's love against the extent of man's sin, not only in His excelling greatness triumphing over it, but being made the sacrifice Himself, so putting it away. We come now to see the stability of God's promise, and the certainty of its accomplishment: "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, 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." We have seen the association with Jesus into which we are brought, and are come to things spiritual, which, being stable, and resting on the security of God's word, cannot be removed when all else shall be shaken.

We will just see what they are: "Ye are come unto Mount Sion; and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." And shall that be shaken? No; the city of the living God rests on the living God, and can never be removed. "To an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly." Can they be shaken? No; there was one great shake in heaven, and the rebel angels were

driven deep into darkness, there to remain; the rest are upheld by His power. “And to the church of the first-born, which are written in heaven; and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” And can these be shaken? No; being made perfect by God, they must remain perfect j they cannot be shaken.

And ye are come “to God the Judge of all.” He being the very security and support of all else that cannot be shaken, He must so stand. And ye are come to Jesus, who is where all these will be—that is, not on earth, but in glory; He was on this earth, and the men of the earth did not like Him, and therefore rejected Him. His voice once shook the earth, but now He is in heaven, and speaking from thence, He has promised, yet once more, to shake all that can be shaken.

In the word, “Yet once more,” we have a remarkable expression, for it comes to us as a promise on the authority of God; it presses itself upon one’s spirit, and bears witness to the truth in the power of the Holy Ghost; it comes to us as a promised truth. Now let us consider whether Jesus has so spoken to us from heaven, as to lead us to thank God that He has promised this from heaven—that in truth we believe the promise, and are looking for the accomplishment of it.

Have we understood this voice from heaven? and do we rejoice in knowing that everything which Satan, the world, and the flesh have set up in opposition and enmity to God shall be shaken terribly, even to their destruction? Can we say in faith, I understand the voice so speaking, and am looking forward with joy to its accomplishment, when all that offends Christ shall be done away with? But have I also heard the voice so

speaking to me from heaven as to identify me with all and everything that cannot be shaken?

Well will it be for the saints when they see the removal of all that burdens and keeps them from the perfect realisation of their unspeakable privileges. They have nothing to fear from that terrible voice which shall "shake terribly the earth." They have heard, and are identified with that blessed voice which speaks to them nought but of love and mercy and peace, and they want no other.

Brethren, beloved of the Lord, what a contemplation is it to enter into, that of our being established—firmly established and settled in those things which cannot be shaken! The extent of that tremendous shake, which is full of woe to him who is fixed here—who is settled on any of those things liable to be shaken—is full of joy to him who is come to the things which cannot be shaken, and which shall therefore remain.

"There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." This shaking time will come; but it is your joy, that those things on which your mind and affections are set, and with which you are associated, cannot be shaken. And further, this voice to believers implies much more, wonderfully much more, than the removal of all things which cannot stand the shaking; it implies their whole blessedness; that they shall then be brought into the full perfectness of the joy of Jesus, resting alone on the stability of God. All things which are made shall be

shaken. At that time, he who is associated with God, and he alone, shall stand the shake. For he is now come spiritually unto that to which he shall enter personally, where nothing defiling, nothing unstable, shall find an entrance.

The believer therefore rests on these two grounds: that the Lord Jesus Christ is thus speaking to him from heaven— speaking peace, and therefore taking away all fear, as regards himself, in the promised convulsion and upturning of all things, and also that the promise of God shall stand, in the setting aside of all that shall not participate in his present glory. Here we see the total dissociation of all and everything connected with an interest in the things of this world: that they are opposed to the things of God—they are quite distinct, and never can be united.

As soon as the season is past for the exercise of God's long-suffering and patience with a guilty world, then will the shaking commence: happy they who are in a way of grace then! Yet there is an admonition to them to watch: "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!" and this watchfulness is to continue to the end, amidst all opposition, supported therein by the life-giving energy of the Holy Ghost. The believer's life is thus manifestly a life of watchfulness; but he rests not here, he looks forward. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable": but he sees beyond this life, he has come to perceive eternal things; and in the power of the Spirit to discern the unquestionable blessedness to which he is called—into the spiritual enjoyment of which, even here, there is no hindrance, not the least impediment, except as regards himself.

Christ has done all that could be, all that was necessary to be done, in order to make the reconciliation perfect.

There is then no hindrance as regards Christ's work; it is a mark of complete perfectness. All things that could keep us from God have been overcome, set aside, triumphed over: and He is now in heaven, in the full consciousness of victory— altogether finished as regards our salvation; entered into heaven, in the presence of God for us, and continually speaking peace to us His people—the consciousness of which, on our part, is wrought in our souls by the eternal Spirit, who, testifying of the joy into which Jesus is entered, and the peace which He proclaims, makes us also full of joy and peace in believing, and looking to that glory into which we also shall be brought, "whither the forerunner is for us entered."

This is the only ground of peace which Christ promised, and it is the privilege of the believer to enjoy this peace, even in the midst of trials and conflicts and afflictions. He looks to Jesus where He now is; and, resting on Him who is now speaking from heaven, he has that peace which passes all understanding, arising from his union, his oneness, his identity with his Lord and Master. Have you thus known the Lord Jesus Christ, as speaking from heaven to you, and speaking peace? Has He told you that all is finished, and that you are privileged to have peace? Do you see your own personal iniquity put away?

I would ask you still further, dear friends, in how far you are associated with that which shall be removed? The voice from heaven has witnessed, has promised, the removal of all things which can be shaken. If you are associated in any way with those, oh, how sad, when

Christ comes, to find you thus! They that are earthly do mind earthly things—that is their character: as the apostle says to the Philippians, “Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” The voice speaking from heaven proclaims the dissociation of Christ and His company from these—from all that is earthly.

I solemnly put it before you, dear friends, Are you thus engaged? or are your hearts, affections, and desires lifted up to Him that is higher than the heavens—to that which cannot be shaken, and can never be removed? Could you receive the shaking of all things, as the promise of God? He has promised, “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.” Blessed, everlastingly blessed, are they who are established in Him who is higher than the heavens! They who are thus fixed are as secure as they will be when associated with Him in glory.

Let me again ask you, dear friends, If this shaking were to come now, where would it find you? Would you be found trembling under the consciousness of being mixed up with that which is to be removed? or borne in perfect peace upon the heart of Him who is to shake all things? May the Lord find you in the latter circumstances—happy in the consciousness of His love and power, ready to enter into the joy unspeakable, and glory of your Lord. Amen.

The Wheat And The Tares

Matthew 13

There is something wonderfully gracious in the way the Lord waits upon His people to instruct them: it is calculated to draw out the affections and the minds of believers in love and gratitude. But how often have they cause for shame, that the occupations of their minds and hearts render them insensible to the various ways, means, and methods in which a God of love teaches them!

God is blessing them all the way, and His mercy is exercised even in their wants. Do they feel and bewail their ingratitude and ignorance? Who teaches like God? His wisdom is the saint's portion. Are they bowed down under a consciousness of weakness and of bondage? "My strength is made perfect in weakness," and thus, in every way, He exactly suits Himself to their several necessities. He never withdraws His care; He never turns aside from them; still doing them good; and, though they may be fearful and fainting, His love is still manifested. Jesus is the fountain of all blessedness, sent to poor, weak, wretched sinners, that they may have abundance of comfort, of peace, and of enjoyment.

The knowledge of this knits and attaches the heart of the poor sinner to such a rich Saviour—makes him find that the way the Lord has led him has displayed to him the character of the God who thus instructs him, that his very sorrows and trials are a manifested proof of God's free love and favour, as succeeding circumstances display the riches of divine grace. The way in which He leads us, the particular circumstances in which we are

placed, the situations we are in, are all so many methods and means of divine instruction planned by a God of love.

The believer longs for rest from all that now offends, but God leaves him here to teach him many lessons. This world, constituted as it is at present, is a means by which God teaches us what we could not learn in a world of glory: the believer is instructed in the long-suffering, patience, and love of God, in a way he never could have known elsewhere; his wants, his weakness, his barrenness, his deadness, display most touchingly the wonderful patience of God. And here too he learns the astonishing proofs of God's love in Christ; giving Him for such sinners that they may be pardoned and freed; learning what God is, in the Person of Jesus Christ, through all the particular circumstances in which they are placed, notwithstanding all our weakness, short-comings, and misdeeds. There is no feeling of hostility in God's mind toward us— not even an impatient word or look; all is love.

It is in the weakness and wants of His children that God's manner of love is even more drawn out, as the Father of a family: the affections of a parent are the same for all his children, but under different circumstances is differently manifested: the long and weak childhood of a child calls forth all the tender sympathy and watchful care of a parent, and knits the affections of a child to him. So the Lord, amidst our weakness and infantine helplessness, guards us, watches over us; and thus we come to learn the manner of God's love. Then, as we advance under the watchful care and training, and arrive towards maturity, we learn the blessedness of His love, and we come to discern how

the Lord opens out the knowledge of Himself, putting us into a position of wondrous blessedness. “Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

This is the manner and blessedness of God’s love to us; and if the believer is insensible to this, he is in a sadly low state; for nothing so much evidences the soul’s not being in a healthful state, as to be insensible to the manner of God’s love toward us, to be engrossed with what is about us here, and not to be sensible that we are nearer to God than we are even to the circumstances in which we are placed. How wondrous to behold God taking pleasure in opening out His mind and His plans to man! which we see evidenced in this thirteenth chapter of Matthew, as in the explanation to His disciples of the parables spoken to the multitude.

We find here seven parables, which have been before noticed, but the order of which it would be well to remark again. The first parable is not a comparison or likeness of the kingdom of heaven, as the others, but a declaration of the agency of the kingdom, and of its particular results—the act described as being incidental to the Son of man before His ascension, and its results also, such as might be exhibited in individuals before as well as after it. The kingdom of heaven was subsequent to this, and consequent on Christ’s resurrection, when a new system of things was about to be established.

The other six parables were not spoken at the same time: three were addressed to the multitude, and three to the disciples alone. Of these the first three exhibit the

public character and result of this kingdom in the world; and the last three symbolised its intrinsic value, and the full development and results in God's hands. The former fully developed its ostensible and visible manifestation as seen in the world, and the latter, the real value of the thing itself as known in the mind of God. This expression, "kingdom of heaven," as well as "the kingdom of your Father," is peculiar to the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel more especially of dispensation and prophetic testimony.

In what situation then is the believer while here? Holding communion with an absent Lord in heaven—brought into His family here—into His kingdom, and taught, not to look for blessings simply upon earth during his Lord's absence, but to look for a time when His saints shall know Him even as they are known, and shall never be absent from Him. That is what they are looking for, and into that situation they have been brought as the "good seed," partakers of the grace of that "corn of wheat," which fell into the ground and died, that they might live.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that sowed good seed in his field." And from verses 24-30 and 36-45, we have the parable and its signification, as explained by the Lord Himself. These things speak their own meaning: therefore they are simply brought before us as matters of fact. He says, as putting any other construction aside, "The field is the world." In these parabolical expressions there is a perfect harmony and conformity of meaning: if we can clearly ascertain the meaning by scripture light in one, we can readily imagine the same meaning of the same word in any other place.

Now our Saviour said expressly, “The field is the world”: this is its meaning, and no other, which brings before us the theatre or the scene where the transaction recorded here takes place— “the world.” It presents us with the view of a person sowing good seed in his field; he that sowed the good seed is the Son of man, the Lord Jesus Christ. He sowed it. It was good seed He sowed, and He sowed it in His field; and this is the world. He was entitled to this field; it belonged to Him. This then is the simple fact: the world was the field; the field belonged to Jesus, and He sowed good seed in it—something that had not previously been in it—a something planted which was not indigenous to the soil. Manifestly then it could not be the Jewish nation or system, for that was placed previous to the period, here alluded to, of the work of the Son of man. The world which is here mentioned is spoken of as a place, not where the seed had been sown and grown up, but where good seed, not yet planted, was now to be put in; and this then is in the world.

Let the child of God now look around him, and see whether (with the exception of those who have been manifestly brought into this new system) he sees anything of this good seed in the world; does it look like a field sown with good seed? In how far it resembles it, those who know the character of such as now possess the world can best tell. The world then is His—the Son of man’s field. Thus this baffles the wisdom and power of those who pretend to claim any portion of it as their own, and who seek to have it all, and are described as saying, “This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.” It is not theirs—it is Christ’s:

His by an indefeasible right—by an indisputable title His.

This indeed, when once established, is calculated to overthrow the pride of vain man, who puts in his pretensions for a share; who calls the world his own; but it is not, it is Christ's; and every one who takes it as his own individual right is meddling with things which belong not to him, and of which he must give an account to the rightful owner. The world then is this field, and the field is Christ's. "While men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat." Here we have the character and circumstances under which this change came about; these men—these field labourers—were put in trust, and the enemy brought in the evil seed while these men slept.

Oh, how little are men aware of the indefatigable perseverance of the enemy of souls! it is while men sleep he does the mischief. It may not for a time be manifested; but he has sown it, and it will soon spring up. Satan is not hindered even by the good seed being there: "for when the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." God does certainly overrule it for His people's good; but the fact is there, that tares have been sown and spring up. They may not be seen immediately; but still they are in the ground, and much of it is occupied by them. The men slept; the enemy entered unperceived, sowed the tares among the wheat, and then went his way, having done the mischief. And the man who cannot see that these tares are now occupying the ground, and springing up, must be wanting indeed in spiritual discernment.

And what need have we of continual jealous watchfulness, that the ground be not more overrun with them! what need to be awake, to be sensible of the position we are in! that there is a positive separation between the wheat and the tares! that there is a wall of everlasting demarcation between them, and that we are not sensible enough of this! Does not sad and bitter experience testify that there is much moral evil countenanced? that there is a very bad and low state tolerated among believers? that there is a mixing up of the world with the things of God, an apparent shrinking and withdrawing from the Lord's work? Do we look for the cause? We find the whole of it here: the men slept, and let in the enemy; but it was His enemy, as the Psalmist says, "Remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily."

The Lord makes His cause and His people's one; they are His, and therefore their enemy is His. He calls them "brethren": "I will declare thy name unto my brethren." The saints of God get much courage from this declaration, when they know that the battle is in the Lord's hand. The saints look on this little word, "His enemy," with great delight. If sensible of our deficiencies and failings, and conscious that, while we slept, the enemy came in, yet let us look to the Lord; even though filled with shame in ourselves, yet let us look to the remedy, and we shall learn here, by this one little word, that it is His enemy, and, consequently, we have the strength of Christ against him.

"When the blade sprung up, then appeared the tares." This was the successful result of the enemy's work; they sprung up together. There was not at first any outward distinction; they were all mixed up together. There was

no remedy for that, as regarded the present state of things; instantly to set the world right was not in the mind of God. Man was found a faithless steward; he had been negligent, and let in the enemy, and the field was found overrun with tares; but God's plans were not frustrated by it.

The servants come and say, "Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?" He said, "An enemy hath done this." The Son of God looked down at His field which He had sowed with good seed, and found it filled with tares: but, though in that position, we find it is not the wisdom of God to set the world to rights by plucking up the tares. The servants said, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? "This is according to man's wisdom, who would set the world to rights again by plucking up and rooting out heretics, and purging out the wickedness according to their own desire. "Nay," said the Lord, there are circumstances existing at present which made this proposal impossible to be acceded to; they are now together, and let them both grow together. If I were to give you power now to pluck up the tares, you might unconsciously root up the wheat with them, which cannot be; "let both grow together until the harvest."

The Lord has graciously explained the meaning of the word in verse 39: "The harvest is the end of the world." The term "world" here is not the same word as that used previously, where it is said, "the field is the world." This unquestionably is (as the literal translation signifies) the age, or dispensation, and should be read, "the harvest is the end of the age." In the first instance where it is used, it renders the meaning simply "the world," which is the scene of this great transaction. It is quite unconnected

with the idea of place, and conveys the time when it was to be thus manifested— at the end of the age or dispensation, and “at the time of the harvest.” Says the Lord, “I will say to the reapers [that is, after both are grown up, fit for the operation], Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Now this presents us first with the view of the gathering together of the tares in bundles for the purpose of being burnt, and then the gathering of the wheat into the barn. After this is the destruction of the tares, as explained by our Lord: “As, therefore, the tares are gathered together and burnt in the fire, so shall it be at the end of this age: the Son of man shall send forth his angels [His messengers, ministers, and ambassadors of His purposes in providence], and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.” And, after that (that is, after the burning of the tares), “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

Here is the order: The tares are gathered in bundles to be burned; the wheat is lodged in the barn; the destruction of the tares, or their entire consumption, then takes place; and, finally, after their destruction, “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

In the third parable, spoken to His disciples alone, we find the Lord using terms analogous to these: The angels dividing the two parties which were hitherto mixed up together, gathering the good into vessels, and casting the bad away and destroying them; and then shall the

righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. This brings before us the unhindered blessedness of the children of God—of those who are alive to God. That time is coming; and it is a thing greatly longed for by the saints. The present position of the world makes it known to them. They see that the tares are ripening fast in iniquity, ready for the destruction; and they see the ripening of the saints of God; and, though now apparently and sadly undistinguished, the Lord is ripening them for the harvest and will gather them in.

The tares are making their progress, being brought together ripe for destruction. Though they may think it is well, and no fear is to overtake them, yet certain and sudden vengeance awaits them. They say, and act on it, that it will not come; but God is true, and His word shall come to pass. Read Rev. 14:14-20. There are the tares then ripening, thinking no harm shall happen unto them; strengthening themselves in their iniquity, and counting the very providence of God (their being bound together in bundles) the very occasion of their strength and power, which is to prove their utter destruction. “The heathen are sunk down in the pit which they made.” “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.” The wheat are not left in the world in the great day; they are gathered into the barn; they are taken out of the way, “caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” They witness the destruction of the Lord’s enemies; and “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

Here we behold the blessedness of the child of God, and the perfect character of that blessedness which the future results of God’s love will evidence. Just remember

that everything that offends has been cast out; all iniquity burnt up, destroyed; the saints safely housed in the barn; and then shall they shihe—observe, “then shall the righteous shine” —they are the righteous. But who are the righteous? Those who are one with Christ: His character is brought forward as “the Lord our righteousness,” and “the Sun of righteousness.” “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.” 2 Sam. 23:4. And in these last words of David we have, along with the description of the glory of the Lord at His coming, a view of the destruction of the wicked: it is a similar passage to the one in the text, and refers to the same event. “But the sons of Belial [that is, the children of the wicked one] shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands” —that is, they cannot be drawn by the teaching and beseeching of man to come to the right. “But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place” (v. 6, 7), that is, in the same place where they are, similar to the burning of the tares.

Christ is the Sun of righteousness, and therefore they are righteousness; He is the Sun, and therefore they shine as the sun: “When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,” and we shall be made like unto Him. This blessedness was contemplated and spoken of by God’s saints of old. We have it in the words of David: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.” That was what he was looking forward to—to shine as the sun, as the righteous; to see God’s honour

vindicated, Satan and his powers cast out, and all God's enemies destroyed, and he himself bearing Christ's likeness; then he would be satisfied. And Paul also expresses himself strongly: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead"; when I shall see Christ as He is, and be like Him, shining as the sun, as the Sun of righteousness. That is what I now see in Spirit, and that is what I now believe in faith, and that is what I am just looking for, to be like Jesus in His kingdom.

Is there in you, dear brethren, this earnest breathing after this glory? this sensibility of enjoying these things? Oh, they are calculated to bring much joy—very real and deep comfort—to know that we shall shine as the sun, when the clouds of vengeance, which now threaten an ungodly world, shall have been discharged in just judgment on them: when these clouds shall then be carried away and dispersed, and all iniquity cast out, then shall the righteous flourish; then comes his time of much delight!

Brethren, are not these things calculated to rejoice the heart of the believer? Further remark that it is said, "In the kingdom of their Father." Here is great blessedness to the child of God in this appropriating word of happiness. It shews the position in which the Lord Jesus has placed them— associated with God as their Father, in His kingdom. We see the mighty result; not only that they shall be righteous— shall shine as the Sun of righteousness, but be brought into their Father's house. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you." He unites Himself to them as one calling them brethren, calling them to look up to God as their Father:

“I will declare thy name unto my brethren”; and again, “I go to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God.”

There are two things which in anticipation minister great comfort to all believers; they shall see the Saviour whom here they loved, and they shall be found in Him, participating in His glory, and like Him. This is what they should be rejoicing in, pressing towards, and looking for. If then indeed ye are children of God, what is grieving you? Think of your high privileges: “We shall see him as he is,” “be like him,” in the presence of the Father, in His house, in the kingdom of our Father, having fellowship with Him everlastingly.

This is the portion of the child of God, a portion we are called on to rejoice in, even here, for it is ours; it is an inheritance reserved for us, and we are reserved to shine as the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

The Church will not always have to mourn an absent Lord. He will come to claim His bride—to take her to Himself, that where He is, she may be also: so He prays, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am”: and in Him she is complete; for the Father gave Him to be “head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” Here then is the position of the church with Christ; one body, one mind, one in all things, one in tastes, one in desires.

Believers thus taste the Father’s love most blessedly by beholding the Lord so sacrificing Himself as to bring this love to them, purchased for their enjoyment and inheritance. They feel the Father’s love: “I say not unto you, I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself

loveth you." If we are believers, let us raise our thoughts to the bliss that awaits us, and not be sinking to the bottom, or floating on the surface of spiritual enjoyment.

It is no matter what are your circumstances here, what are your cares or your conflicts; it is but for a moment; the portion of the saints is to rejoice. But what is it that you are bowed down for? Is it a feeling of your own weakness? Why, the very "joy of the Lord is your strength." Why are you in affliction? What is it that keeps you down? Is it the world of sin? That is your enemy; and that it is your enemy is the cause of the greatest rejoicing: this is your confidence, and should be your delight, that it is a conquered enemy. If you feel it is your enemy, you know it is His enemy, and then you are brought.into the same position with the Lord Jesus; on one side with Him, fighting one common enemy. Jesus warned His disciples of this trouble, but promised them His peace—promised to be with them by the Spirit, and testified to them the result of all the work He was doing for them: "I have overcome the world." Think, if you be of them who are thus loved and thus made happy here, what happiness yet awaits you when you shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of your Father! Blessed indeed shall we be in that day, when "we shall see him as he is"; first, "be like him," and then "see him as he is." Oh, the blessedness! when, after all troubles and conflicts are over, we shall "awake in his likeness."

Believers, is there nothing in this to quicken your joy in meeting Jesus? Is there nothing in this to throw contempt upon the world, and its unmeaning joys? The soul that loves Jesus loves one who has conquered all his enemies; "He that ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." In this is the Son of God's love

manifested, in that He humbled Himself to descend to the children of men, to bear their iniquity, to carry their sorrows and troubles, to minister to their joys and comforts, and to bear away sin from them for ever! And their joy and confidence is, that the same Lord has ascended on high, having “led captivity captive” — having destroyed His and their enemy: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Is it any comfort to you, that the wisdom of God will soon be seen in the world, to the destruction of all that oppose it? Would you like to have the world thus sifted, and all iniquity purged out? Would it rejoice your heart to hear that Jesus was now coming? In fact, would you like Him to come now? Oh! how sad, how very sad is it, that, when He is just about to come, and His saints about to be made entirely like Him, they should be mixed up in any way with the workers of iniquity, practising their habits, pursuits, or satisfactions!

Pray, brethren, that you may be led to a more simple and entire conformity to the image of your Saviour; that you may be cleansed from the unsatisfying and unsanctifying desires of the world, so that you may be ready to meet your Lord at His appearing.

Adam And Christ

Romans 5:14-21

In the latter part of this chapter is exhibited strikingly the sin, and the consequences of that sin, wrought and incurred by Adam; and the grace that is manifested in Jesus Christ, as contrasted the one with the other.

This is a very important position, as displaying the character and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, contrasted with the first Adam, of whom, in his innocence, the latter was a type and figure; the one as the head of all grace and truth, the representative of all believers; and the other as the head of all sin and misery, a representative of all sinners by nature. This distinction is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15: “The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven”; and here, verse 14, he is said to be “the figure of him that was to come.”

The over-abundant love and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is testified of in the next verse: “For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.” And the contrast is very striking as we continue: “And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by one righteousness the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”

Here we have, in a perspective view, the effect of Adam's sin, and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see here the way in which He met the whole question of the controversy between God and man.

In the Psalms we have an exhibition of the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ, under sufferings, trials, temptations, and afflictions; and throughout the Scriptures we have the facts of the life, thoughts, feelings, and character of Adam and Christ. We have in Adam the head and root of a sinful world, lying in wickedness and misery; and in Christ the head and root of a world of blessedness, reigning in life, opening a "new and living way," prevailing over man's sin and ruin. Not merely the saving of souls to God, but positively triumphing over man's evil, over the utmost evil man could do. Not only undoing what man had done, but over-abounding in blessedness the ruin man had brought on himself. Not only setting aside the work done by man, but manifesting the riches of divine love over evil, sin, ruin, and misery, allowed for the purpose of displaying more astonishingly the greatness of God's love, and His direct contrast in all things to man.

Now this is what we are to look for in Christ; a remedy adequate to the evil sin had wrought; a remedy that should meet and overbalance the weight of iniquity: and we have it in Christ, in the exceeding riches of His grace. The way and means were of His own devising and His own executing, to display His goodness to us in Christ Jesus, that He should be the substance of the joy of His people, the rest of their souls, the object of their hopes, the desire of their affections. And such He is. Evil has abounded, and sin has taken its free, full course. We shall trace its root, rise, and progress in the first Adam,

in whose sin we have the complete and entire alienation of man's heart from God: the virtual denial and rejection of God as a God over him, and the practical consequences of that denial—the taking of Satan as a god in preference, and trusting and confiding in him rather than in God.

Now, I say, this is just the position the world is in at present. They have practically and decidedly taken Satan for god, to the rejection of the Lord; they have lost all hopes of favour; they have forfeited all claim to any blessing God can confer. All the world has done this positively and willingly; and every individual is doing so, until Christ calls him out of the world in principle, desire, and soul; brings him to rest on Him for all things; just undoes in his soul what the sin of the first Adam (and he himself springing from that root) has done; makes him an heir of God; puts into his heart the Spirit, crying, "Abba, Father"; and enables him to know and understand the association of principle, feeling, and actual position in which he stands with Christ, when exclaiming, "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." From thence is all our hope and happiness; we are brought over to trust Him, to live in His life, and no longer to live under the dominion of the devil, who "worketh in the children of disobedience." We actually "become sons of God," are delivered from the offences of the first Adam, and are no longer in the position of the world.

The sin of Adam induced the wrath of heaven's offended majesty; and we shall see that the work of the Lord Jesus Christ just met, in every circumstance and in every position, this situation; as a man, presenting the very opposite of what Adam was after his transgression. Let

us view Adam first in his creation, as he came out of the hands of God—the image of God—in His own likeness; we see him a type of Him in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily: everything subordinate to him, put in authority under him; all the animals— everything of animate and inanimate nature in subserviency to him; all brought to him to give them names: “And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.”

Psalm 8 evidently refers to this, from verse 4. But in connection with Hebrews 2, where it is quoted, we find it was typical of the Lord Jesus Christ: “Thou madest him a little lower than the angels” (in His humiliation). “We see not yet all things put under him” (but that we shall see at His coming). “But,” says the apostle, “we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” Here He became practically the head and root of a new creation, manifested so at His resurrection. The Lord was doing for His people, in His humiliation, all that was necessary to put away sin—suffered what was due to sin, and suffered unto death. Being then quickened according to the Spirit of holiness as a risen Saviour, He becomes the Head of a new creation, as Adam was of the old.

View Adam in the garden, and we shall discern in his conduct that he had everything that qualified him to be the head and root of a sinful world. So Christ (as manifesting the very opposite conduct, under the most difficult circumstances) is eminently qualified to be the Head of His people. Adam was placed in an innocent world, surrounded by every blessing, and with every

holy and righteous feeling which could call forth his love and gratitude to the great Giver, and which ought to have led him to confidence in Him. God had placed trust in him: He put him as a steward over His goods. He reflected His own image on him, and made him capable of holding converse with Himself: he was the link, as it were, between God and this world.

Being thus trusted of God, put into this highly honourable situation, everything made for him, God delighting in him, as in Proverbs 8: “Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men”: in this situation of trust, confidence, and delight, what followed? How did Adam comport himself and sustain his integrity? The enemy of souls approached. With subtility he inquires, “Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” and, on hearing God’s authoritative threatening in case of delinquency, adds, “Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” At the first outset he impugns the truth of God’s word, and endeavours to make Him a liar.

Now the man was in full recognition of God’s command — “Thou shalt not eat of the tree. He knew it was a pledge of his obedience; that God, as supreme Sovereign, should have the satisfaction of being obeyed: he knew the Lord had a right to this obedience, and fully understood that He had threatened punishment in case of disobedience; he knew the Lord had said, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Here we see three things in which the devil desired the man should dishonour God: first, as to His grace: secondly, as to His truth: and, thirdly, as to the majesty of His

Godhead. On this suggestion we find man really acted, and did so dishonour God.

We shall behold, in this transaction, the first Adam denying virtually God's grace, truth, and majesty; and in the second Man we are to see them vindicated and honoured; for "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," the majesty of Jehovah being also manifested in Him. Let us now see how Satan and man dealt with God's truth, love, and majesty. God, as it has been observed, bestowed all favours on this man, made him an example to all the universe of His manifested love, and gave him just one command, that man might have the opportunity of shewing his sense of the favours of God by an easy observance of it. Satan comes and says to this effect: Did God say so and so? Do not you believe Him; He did not tell you the truth. God knows He has kept the only good away from you; do not trust Him. He does not mean it for your good; He means a lie; He means to deceive you. He is only keeping it from you because He knows well that if you eat of it, you will be as God, "knowing good and evil." Here then was the temptation to distrust God, to doubt His love, and to assume the privileges of God Himself: "Ye shall be as gods."

Now in this is included every principle in which God could be dishonoured by man in the position in which Adam then stood. And how did he act? When he saw (or she saw, which is the same for our purpose) "that the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise," he did eat it, in positive and known disobedience to God's command; he acted on the present enjoyment, without any regard to consequences; and the world has ever since acted

precisely on the same principles, and precisely on the same grounds: are they condemned?

Many endeavour to screen themselves by this: I have done no harm to my neighbour; I am not guilty of dishonesty, of thieving, murder, and such hke. No more was Adam; he did no harm to his neighbour (except as his conduct involved all in his guilt); but this was just his condemnation, in not recognising and acting on the truth, love, and majesty of God; in acting on the devil's suggestions rather than God's, and so making God a liar. God says, "Ye shall die"; the devil says, "Ye shall not": and there is just the question between them. Which will man believe? The devil puts the present pleasantness of the thing before the man, and he cares not for the consequences; let those come on the man himself, so that he can lure him to his ruin. He never tells him "the wages of sin is death"; and man, with the present enjoyments in view, cares not for it either. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," have present enjoyment connected with them: so he embraces them and runs after them; though in so doing, he denies the truth of God, rejects His authority, and assumes His power.

This is really what Adam did; and in the consequences we are all naturally involved. He believed the devil rather than God; he thought the devil truer than God; he looked upon him as a better friend than God; just as we should rely on the promise and word of one whom we esteem our best friend. He put the devil's word in place of the law of God; he looked upon God as an austere judge, and grudging; one who had a good thing to give him, and yet denied it to him, because He did not wish to make him as Himself, but rather was gratified in

keeping it from him. This was the opinion man had of God, when he willingly subjected himself to the dominion of Satan.

Now let us view his conduct after he had sinned. What do we find him doing? Hiding himself. What else could he do? He would have been well pleased had there been no God to spy out his sin. But it was not so, and he was now confronted. The voice of God called aloud, “Adam, where art thou?” He whom He had entrusted with so many blessings now runs away from Him, and hides himself: he had disputed the authority of God, and sold himself to the devil, and withal involved all his posterity in the guilt of rejecting God as a sovereign, and taking the devil as a god, bowing down in submission to his will. And in this position is the world at present, in which we are now living, the only living instance of unpunished apostasy: the consequences are to come.

But man is the only intelligent being who is still alive in successful apostasy. What do we find in the case of the fallen angels? Their sin brought its immediate and irremediable punishment. Man—man alone is abiding in unbelief; condemned indeed, but still the sentence of execution is suspended. God came down to this man who had thus cast off His allegiance; He came to one who had been His former associate and companion: God brings him out of his hiding-place. What then is man’s first act? To excuse himself: and here again the world most accurately follows his example. They sin, and then plead, as an excuse or extentuation of their guilt, temptation, natural desire, expediency, etc. But we rest on God’s truth when we declare there is no excuse that man makes, which is not, in fact, the very ground of his condemnation, yea, the very reason for it.

One instance from Scripture in passing. In the parable of the marriage supper, the excuse one who was invited gave for not attending was, “I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.” Where was the “needs be”? Only just this, that he preferred his own gratification to the reception of the Lord’s invitation. Just so Adam; his excuse was, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the fruit, and I did eat.” The very excuse he brings is the very ground on which God condemns him: “Because thou hast hearkened unto thy wife … cursed is the ground for thy sake.” Thus out of his own mouth was he judged!

Now we pass to the Second Man—the character and work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and we shall see exactly the opposite of this in every particular. We shall see how in thought, word, and deed, He perfectly vindicated the truth, love, and majesty of the great God of heaven, which man had thus shamefully and wilfully dishonoured. How did he vindicate the truth of God? The Lord had said, “Thou shalt surely die.” Christ came as the great witness to His people, that “the wages of sin is death”; and that by imputation only, for He was perfectly and entirely holy. But He took our sins; He bore our iniquities. He was willing to be looked upon as the guilty, and to bear the penalty God had annexed to sin, “Thou shalt surely die,” in order to vindicate the truth of God.

If any on earth could be spared the threatened punishment, it was Jesus. Holy in all respects abstractedly of His divinity; entirely free from sin or approximation to it; without the slightest shadow of evil as it regarded Himself, and yet by imputation, willing imputation, His: if any could be spared, it was He. But

no; God had said it, and Christ came to bear witness to the truth of God's word. If we would see the bitterness of sin, the tremendous consequences of it, and its utter hatefulness in the sight of God, where shall we see it but in the death of Christ, God's fellow, His well-beloved Son? "He spared not his Son "; He delivered Him up to the death of the cross!

We see again how He fully vindicated the love of God. That God, whom man looked upon as a grudging God, keeping back from him that which was desirable—that God gave His only begotten Son for man's transgression! How eminently conspicuous is God's love here, in the sufferings and death of Jesus! The more righteous and holy Jesus was, the more God's love was displayed in giving Him for sin. He needed not to die for His own offences, for He had committed none; nor for His own sins, for He "knew no sin." He was brought nevertheless to the extremity of suffering and shame, and yet trusted and confided in God, in circumstances all opposite to those in which Adam was placed.

Adam was surrounded with every blessing and comfort: Christ was in the midst of poverty, degradation, and woe; so that He could say, "Reproach hath broken my heart; I am full of heaviness": "My soul is exceeding sorrowful": "My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels": "Dogs have compassed me"; "bulls of Bashan have beset me round": "I am poured out like water."

Adam was blessed with the full enjoyment of God's countenance up to the moment that he apostatised from God. Christ, under the very dread of this even in prospect, could look upon all other things as light in

comparison; as in Psalm 22, when enumerating some of the indignities He was to receive, He says, “They parted my garments … they gaped upon me”; but He adds, “but be not thou far from me, O Lord.” And still, in the very moment when God was to visit on His soul the most awful effects of His people’s delinquency—when, for their sins and the salvation of their souls, and that they might everlastingly enjoy the presence of God’s countenance, He was to withhold the comfortable perception of it from His expiring Son; when, at the extent and summit of such dreadful agony, the exclamation was drawn from His holy soul, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” yet is the language of His soul, “But thou continuest holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel”: even in the moment of extremest sufferings a doubt of God’s faithfulness never passed His holy mind.

“Ye shall be as gods “was the bait the tempter threw out, which succeeded in drawing man from his allegiance to God. Now, how did Christ act as opposed to this? In Psalm 22 again He says, “I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.” And we know that, though God Himself, and equal with God, “He made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Man aspired to be God, and fell; and the Lord Jesus Christ, though very God, humbled Himself to “the dust of death,” thus vindicating in His own Person the majesty of the eternal God.

Thus we see that Christ met all the sin and guilt which devolved upon His people, in consequence of Adam’s

transgression. He did not endeavour to screen the sin, to hide it from God's sight, to excuse that with which He was laden. No, He hung between heaven and earth—"lifted up" — bearing the iniquity of His people in His own body on the tree. Far from denying or concealing it, He desires to open all His soul to God: "All my desires are before thee": "My groaning is not hid from thee." He feels its bitterness: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful." Why thus? "He knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth"; yet He says, "My sins are not hid from thee: shame hath covered my face." What is He then confessing, but His people's sins? He had none to confess of His own; He therefore takes and holds up and confessed theirs, submitting to the consequences of them.

Now that is just our blessing; that is just what constitutes our peace and comfort, when by faith we can see Him making these sins of ours His own—bearing them and their deserved punishment; not only lifting them up to God, but owning them, and bearing them away for ever! presenting Himself as the victim, to atone for sins which were committed against the truth, majesty, and love of God. Thus He vindicated God's glory, while He was well qualified to become the head of His people.

As a man He was well qualified, as the transgression came by a man; while His Godhead rendered His obedience meritorious and transferable. And when by faith it is received, it brings the full tide of personal comfort to the believer, just shewing him what he is in the first Adam, and what he is brought to in the Second. He sees Christ as the great High Priest on the day of atonement, bringing in the blood, sprinkling it within the

veil, confessing and owning the sins of His people (as in Psalm 40), laying them on the head of the victim, carrying them into the grave of forgetfulness, as the great confessor of the saints, bearing up their sins before the face of God His Father, while in His body and soul He is bearing the consequences, enduring the penalty and doing it away for ever I Remember too, all this, in a way of entire perfectness of intention and obedience; not deterred from it when in prospect, nor refusing it when offered. Witness the garden of Gethsemane—the bitterness of the cup which the Father gave Him to drink! What perfectness of blessing for His chosen ones in that He did not put it away from Him! and, though He prayed, “Be not thou far from me, O Lord,” under a sense of affliction and sorrow, still perfect in suffering, thus becoming the author of salvation to all who shall believe on Him.

Believers, can you then love that world which inflicted such woes on the Lord Jesus? Do you not see the total distinction and opposition in all things between the world and the brethren of the Lord Jesus? Are we then walking in the inheritance of the first or the second Adam? Are we practically assimilated, in thought, feeling, deportment, or pursuit, with that world which rejected Christ? Or are our associations with the Lord? Does this association lead us to say and to feel, Christ is not ashamed to call us brethren? All mankind are naturally and truly associated with the first Adam, and all Christ’s people are as naturally associated with Him; “complete in him.” As all are heirs of sin and shame by the first Adam, so shall every one that believes be (nay they are so now) heirs with Christ in all things, united to Him in a vital and indissoluble union. They are one with

Him in privilege, interest, blessing, and are heirs of all the glory He possesses: “Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” Whatever belongs to Him of blessing or glory, He has for His own: “All things are yours,” says the apostle, “for ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

Such being God’s truth, let us, brethren, seek renewed knowledge of our personal interest and fellowship with Him. Seek to receive more from Him: the more He gives, the more He is glorified. As certainly as we are by nature united to the first Adam, and bearing his likeness and image, so surely, if we are believers, are we associated with Christ in everything, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”

Now we see our glorious Head by faith alone; but soon shall we see Him as He is, in all His glory, and be changed into that same glory. In the meantime, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” May we, then, be filled with the fulness of Christ! The Scriptures open out all the blessings that are in Him: all fulness dwells in Christ; and we, brethren of the Lord, are interested in it, by a union commenced in time, to be consummated in a never-ending and blissful eternity!

Life In Resurrection

Colossians 3:1-4

The great principle upon which a Christian stands is as to what is his life, and from whence it flows. The Christian is said to be raised from the dead—to have risen with Christ; and whatever is not thus quickened and risen is not of Christ. “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” All blessing and comfort is associated with this life in resurrection. There is the entering on a new position, and the setting aside for ever all previous and natural situation.

The apostle alludes to this in the preceding chapter where he says, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” And again, in chapter 3:1: “If ye then be risen with Christ.” The principle of life flows then from this: that he is dead, dead with Christ, quickened with Christ, risen with Christ; thus manifesting his practical identification with Christ in all things.

In Ephesians 2 it is said, “You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins,” to manifest “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead.” The same power which wrought in Christ’s resurrection is effectual for the spiritual resurrection of His people. “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… and hath

raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

The Christian then, being quickened with Christ, has the resurrection-life of Christ, and is privileged to sit in Him in heavenly places, unto eternal life, as Christ is now sitting at the right hand of God; and the consequence of this position, when made known to the soul, is to bring in a rich revenue of joy and comfort, even "joy and peace in believing."

Now, where an individual is not in this position, it is just to be under all his trespasses and sins—to have them upon himself. He is a sinner, as all are; but he is nothing else than a sinner in thought, principle, affection, and standing; all that he is, and he is nothing else. Perhaps he may not outwardly have manifested as much sin as others. He may have been restrained by regard to decorum; he may not have been placed in such circumstances as to draw it out equally with others. He may not have had the opportunity as others of appearing as great a sinner, but still he is a sinner, and nothing else. If he has committed, in thought, word, or act, one sin, that is the evidence that he is a sinner, as one bad fruit evidences the unsoundness of the tree. Where did he get the inclination to transgress? No union of outward circumstances could have brought forth what was not within.

Now there is no association of principle with God as long as man remains in that state; but it decidedly manifests his departure from God. It was that which caused Adam to be driven out from the presence of God; actual transgression, arising from dissociation of principle from God; and all Adam's responsible posterity

have actually transgressed; and so their natural position is, alienation from God: and except those who have received the new life, being dead with Christ and risen with Him—that is just the position and standing of every individual. There is no difference of their being driven out— all were driven out in Adam. As it says in Romans, “There is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

There is one grand sin which leads men to the commission of all others—the desire to please themselves. If this has once been acted on, it constitutes that man a sinner; just as the breach of one law of the land stamps a man a criminal. We do not require him to run through the transgression of every law in the statute book in order to bring him in guilty; his having broken one is the evidence of his guilt: we need no further proof. While acting then on this as a principle, we are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. There is no life, no love, in us; as our Saviour said to those by whom He was surrounded: “I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.” Now this is the real fact, that there is no assimilation to God in man’s natural state; but the contrary principle—hatred, enmity.

Now this is the position of every individual of the human race, until called out of the general mass by divine grace. He is sprung from Adam, associated with him in his sin, as to its guilt and condemnation, belongs to that world which has the guilt not only of leaving God but of positively rejecting Him. That is the world he loves, belongs to, and forms a part of; and whether his transgressions are few or great, he is doomed to destruction, if he continue so to the end. Just as in the case of the flood: doubtless there was a wide difference

in the amount of actual transgressions among the sinful inhabitants of the world at that time; but none were saved but Noah. Many might even have bid fair to be saved, so as to be near the ark, but none were saved except such as were in the ark. So in Sodom: many had not so openly exhibited their enmity to God as others, and yet, in the general conflagration, Lot alone escaped; and why? Just because all the others, without distinction, were opposed to God—were quite opposite to Him in every principle, and consequently had come to that state of exclusion from God's presence.

If so, we are at present without God in the world; and to be for ever without Him is perfect misery. And is not this really the present position of the world, though they are unconscious of it? There is a veil cast on futurity, as it regards them. They are occupied in the pleasures, amusements, profits, and pursuits of a Christ-rejecting world. But when the veil is raised, then will their position be disclosed. And whosoever is of Christ will have Christ's portion; they will enter on the enjoyment of that portion, which by faith they now see is prepared for them.

By faith alone have we any of these exceeding great promises now. Now is the time for us to ascertain by faith our personal identification with Christ. Now are we to know our interest in Him. The time is coming, yea, swiftly coming, when we shall know even as we are known; and as we are now quickened, raised, brought forth, what should be the effects but to manifest our identification with Christ, in a union so close and abiding that Paul says, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones"?

Christ went down into death for our transgressions, though holy, yet accounted guilty. He did suffer the penalty of sin, and was brought “into the dust of death.” He became dead. Having thus put away sin, He rose again—He is a risen Christ. A risen Christ is one that was dead; and it is with a risen Christ that we have now to do. This state of blessedness He reveals to the soul by the Spirit of truth. He reveals what He had done in man’s estate for man: as having borne our sins, and thus evidencing that “the wages of sin is death.” The believer then knows experimentally what Christ was doing here. He was bearing sin on the cross, and making sacrifice of Himself to the justice of God; “It pleased Jehovah to bruise him.”

Now there is the point on which the Christian rests: the power of the recognition of God’s pleasure and God’s approbation in the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ; the point at which we feel the woes of Jesus inflicted: not the external perception, irrespective of a personal interest in His unexampled afflictions, such as the daughters of Jerusalem felt, when they bewailed and lamented Him. “Daughters of Jerusalem,” said He, “weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

To weep in tender sympathy for human sufferings and woe does not testify a union of sentiment with God; but the recognition of the wherefore “it pleased Jehovah to bruise him,” leading us to sorrow for those sins, and to rejoice at the Lord’s approbation of their removal. This is a godly affection; this brings to the soul a perception of Christ’s woes, when He says, “Thou hast brought me into the dust of death.” When the cup of suffering was presented to Him, mixed up with the bitterness of our

sins—holy, yet agonised—sinless, yet bruised: does not this present us with the view God must take of sin? When we see, not the perpetrator, but the bearer of sin only, exposed to such unexampled sufferings; and yet where, in what position, can we perceive so clearly and completely the riches of divine grace, and love, and mercy, as here?—"He spared not his own Son."

It is not merely the fact that He was left as it were to the unmitigated rage of man; it was not merely that Adam's sinful race were permitted to "persecute and take him"; but God Himself withdrew the comfortable perception of the light of His countenance, which extorted from Him that bitter cry, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" The prophet, in the prospect of this event, declares in Isaiah 53. "He had done no violence, neither was deceit found in his mouth: yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him" —and why?

There must have been some great concern passing between heaven and earth; some wonderful transaction pending between God and man; some immense negotiation which was now to be decided, sufficient to awaken the world, and into which the very "angels desire to look." There must have been a something great and tremendous to have had such consequences attached to it; to have seen Him of whom the Father's testimony was, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; and yet "pleased to bruise him!"

When this great mystery is understood (and none but a believer can enter into the spiritual perception of it), the soul is brought out of a state of death and darkness, and is translated into life and light. It then sees and feels what it was that caused the Father to bruise Him, and

the Son willing to be bound. When the believer sees Christ reduced to that state of suffering as to cry, “Now is my soul troubled,” then the believer himself experiences something of this soul-trouble; when he hears Him exclaim, “The waters ‘are come in, even unto my soul! “and sees Christ “sore amazed, and very heavy,” then he participates in spirit in it; he sees, feels, believes it; and, seeing in it the evidence of the love of Christ, is glad, and rejoices.

And now, what were all these sufferings about? Sin, sin was the cause of all, and such sin as to draw down such fearful consequences on the bearer of it—how tremendous! Now, if we are not such wrath-deserving sinners, for whom was it undertaken? Assuredly not for us. If we have not come to the consciousness that our individual sins were so aggravated that in full justice they deserved what was laid on Jesus; that as He was bearing our sin, so was He bearing the penalty of it; if we are not brought to see these sins as ours, and the guilt of them ours, we have no consciousness of assimilation or union with Christ. If any of you can say, I know nothing of this soul-trouble, this does not describe my feelings and state, then what have you to do with the promises of eternal life to the miserable, wretched, sinful? If you can say, It is not so with me; I do not think myself so bad as to draw down such heavy judgments upon me individually; I am not worse than others, and sin is not such a grief to me; then assuredly all these sufferings and agony and woe cannot be manifestly about you.

If the consciousness of it has not been to make you “sore amazed and very heavy,” troubled and oppressed, then is Christ crucified no concern as yet of yours. But if we

have seen and received the truth, that the death of Christ was the wages of our sins; if we have seen and understood the meaning and sense of His sufferings and death, and by appropriation can lay claim to them as ours, then the resurrection comes home to our souls with a quickening and revivifying power.

If we have seen Him really bearing the consequences of our sins, brought into the dust of death for us; if we can experimentally understand Christ on the tree, bearing the heavy burden of His people's sins—so heavy, that they bore Him to the very dust of death and brought Him low, even to the grave; if we can see Him rising without them, having put them away by His precious blood; then are we in a state to enter into the perception of that glorious privilege, "having forgiven you all trespasses." Though our sins brought Him down to the grave, yet they could not hold Him there, "because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." He rose, having triumphed over sin; He left sin no longer on His people or Himself, but washed it all away, never to appear against them, never again to draw down heaven's wrath.

The grave then has borne witness with us that He was dead; that He put away sin, rose above it and every enemy: the full tide of His people's iniquity was here expiated, and for ever! Eternal justice poured down the punishment which sin deserved, until sin was no more. Christ, having risen from the dead, became the living witness that the justice and truth of God were for ever satisfied. Had there been one sin unatoned for, there the surety must have remained. "Thou shalt not depart thence till thou hast paid the very last mite": that is

what the law exacts; but the penalty was paid in all its demands, and eternal justice perfectly satisfied.

There was no more required, nothing more demanded; and all this in perfect accordance with the purpose, counsel, and determination of God. The sins were owned, were confessed in penitence and shame, were mourned over, and the bearer held up to heaven, on which were to be inflicted the terrible effects of God's wrath. That wrath He met, and thus for ever settled the question between God and sin.

There is no more suffering for sin; the controversy is now at an end for ever. Now the believer has done with sin, as regards God's anger and condemnation; he also is risen, risen with Christ—has recognised it as his sin which is put away by the Redeemer—that He was accounted the guilty one. Seeing this, he sees his sin put away; if he did not, it would be to suppose that the sufferings were not commensurate to the extent of sin; that the death of the victim has not expiated all; that it is not all done away with; but the believer, who is conscious of having risen with Christ, sees sin gone, forgotten, no more to be remembered. It is actually gone as regards us (believers); and in that position we are actually standing in the presence of God, justified from all things, risen with Him without sin unto salvation, brought up before God in a justified state.

Who then can (or shall) lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God Himself that justifieth; it is Christ Himself that died, yea rather, that is risen; nay in Him His people are complete, and made one by virtue of union with Him here. How solid is the ground for peace, and an occasion for great rejoicing, "He was delivered

for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Now we see that this mighty transaction was all about us, and that we are the persons interested in it. Now indeed we see why Christ became incarnate, suffered, and died: it was for us, and for us too He rose again. The moment we can, by faith, see our personal interest in the sinless sufferings of Christ, that moment we have the certainty of our redemption; we taste of the cup which He drank, and are associated with Him in all He did and suffered.

Having seen what we belonged to as heirs of the first Adam, "by nature children of wrath, even as others," we now see our entrance on another position, as heirs of the second Adam; we see that, as we did belong to that system of whose members it is said, "They have all gone out of the way"; and that "there is none good, no, not one"; and that "they drink in iniquity like water"; believers can say, "Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"; they are now translated into another state, another system of things; they are "risen with him through the faith of the operation of God "; they have heard the voice of the Son of God, and live; they live the life of Christ; and though this life is not fully exhibited in this present dispensation, yet it is a real true life.

There is more truth in God's life than in man's life: it is not a name, a voice, a notion, but eternal life, that very life which Christ has now, that very life which is without end, that we have. "He that hath the Son hath life"; he has it now: there is no such thing as shall, as regards our possession of it. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life"; and is not the believer called upon, by these wonderful mercies, by this stupendous grace, to exhibit his possession of this eternal life? He is. And

how? The apostle says, “Seek those things which are above,” Col. 3:3.

Now, brethren in the Lord Jesus, are you doing so? Are you dead now to all that you were conscious of being alive to before? It is true, your life is hid now to sight, you see it not; but “blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” It is, nevertheless, a certain life; and when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall they who have been quickened by the life-giving power of the Son of God appear with Him; then will it be seen that there w, and there can be, “no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” Of this they are now conscious, for “he that believeth hath the witness in himself.” Yes, they have the eternal Spirit testifying to the believer of the truth of God, making known to him his personal identification with Christ, his oneness with Him, as well as his perfect acceptance and justification in consequence of His work.

In the sensible enjoyment of this the believer lives, and walks accordingly. He lives, subject to this new life which he derives from Christ; it has its desires, affections, and objects of delight. Your natural life has its likings and attractions, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”; and so has the life of God—Christ in glory, having triumphed over every enemy, and holiness and happiness with Him in heaven: these are our objects, our desires—the affections tend upwards to them.

Suppose a person now alive with Christ in glory, what would be his desires, feelings, and pursuits? Just similar, then, should be that of those who are alive with Him with that life which Christ gives. The glory of God should

be their one end and aim. They have not merely the forfeited life which Adam lost, but eternal life.

The peculiar joy of the believer is the consciousness that he stands before God as Jesus stands; that he is a partaker of that love which God has for Jesus. So prayed Christ, “that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” Where can we know anything of this love but in Jesus? The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He alone declares it. He brings it to our souls as one that knows it Himself, and tells us that God has loved us as He loves Him.

Here then is the position of the Christian, and it is a position of deep blessedness, everlasting blessedness, to stand as Christ stands before God, without the shadow or imputation of sin, perfectly justified, to be loved with the same love. This is wondrous blessing; and this is Christ’s joy and delight, to bring them into the same blessedness with Himself, as happy as Himself. It is His very rejoicing to come and make known to the soul these great and inestimable privileges, to reveal Himself and the Father by the eternal Comforter; and, notwithstanding the weariness of the flesh, the body of corruption, and the many, many hindrances to the enjoyment of this privileged spiritual existence, yet doth grace triumph over all in the soul of the believer, enabling him in faith to enter into the appropriation of Christ’s declaration: “My Father and your Father, my God and your God.” Standing as in the presence of God, free from all condemnation, resulting from what Christ has done and suffered, having made reconciliation for iniquity and brought in everlasting righteousness. Now faith realises this; it recognises the justice of God

satisfied, and His love well pleased; it rests on this, and lives in the enjoyment of it.

Now do you believe this? If you do, what practical effects has it led to? Are you dead to the world? Would you like to be dead? Would you feel it painful to be as dead to the world as Christ is now? There can be no assimilation to heaven in the things, desires, and pursuits of this world. The world does not like heaven, nor anything belonging to heaven: such is the judgment that was passed on it; it was proved when the Lord came down from heaven, and they turned Him out of the world. God had one Son; there was just one thing in heaven with which God would try man; “I have yet one Son, it may be they will reverence him.” But no; they would not let Christ have the world, neither would they have Him. Men did not like Him; He was not the portion they wanted, and therefore they got rid of Him.

Now we must either have the portion of the world, or Christ’s portion. Happy they who have the Lord for their portion! Happy they who are dead to all the little gilded toys of the world, which Satan has scattered around in order to entrap us! All the blessings and fulness of the Father’s love are in Christ’s portion; but then He is a Saviour that is dead to every other portion; soon will this be, not a hidden treasure, but a manifested one. He is now gathering out of the world His own, picking them out from among all nations, testifying His unwearied patience and forbearance towards still unpunished sinners; but when the last saint has been brought into the church, Christ Himself will then appear, to the joy of those who have confessed His name here and borne testimony to His truth, who have been content to give up all for Him. It will be then quite another scene from

what the world anticipates, quite another dispensation; and what the saints have been waiting for will then be accomplished— “the manifestation of the sons of God.”

Have you believed this? If you have, do you act on it? Are you looking for, and hastening towards, the appearing of the glory of the Lord? Are you conscious of being dead to that world which crucified Christ? When you say, We are “risen with Christ,” are you conscious of a distaste to, a dissociation from, those things that crucified Him? or are you alive to a judged world? are you favouring that world? If you are, then are you fit assessors over it? for the word of God declares, “the saints shall judge the world.” “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” “If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

If you are one with Christ, walk in the privileges of that union, and “when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

Washing The Disciples' Feet

John 13:1-11

Two of these verses claim particular attention in commencing our subject. The first is, "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come 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 verse 3: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God": for these reasons He arose from supper, and prepared to wash His disciples' feet. Observe, dear friends, His knowledge that the hour was come when He should depart out of this world unto the Father, and loving His own which were in the world unto the end, was one reason why our Lord washed the feet of His disciples; and knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God and went to God, was another reason why He washed their feet.

This demands our attentive consideration: why His leaving the world, and the love which He had to His own which were in the world, and His knowledge of the power over all things which was given Him by the Father, His coming from God and now going to Him, should be the reasons why our Lord (as related in this chapter) laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself. He did this because His hour was come that He should depart out of this world, and because He loved His disciples unto the end. The reason is explained by what passed between our Lord and Peter: "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. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

Here, dear friends, we see the reason why our Lord's leaving the world, loving His own which were in the world, and an apprehension of His future glory, led Him to wash His disciples' feet. All is explained by His saying, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me." What do we learn from this? That all His people have a part with Him; they partake of all the benefits of His life and death; they are loved of the Father as Christ Himself is loved by Him; they have a part with Him in His future glory; they are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; they shall reign for ever with Christ, sitting with Him on His throne. In all things they are one with Him, and hence they are assured, "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." I say then, dear friends, it was because His own had a part with Him that He washed their feet, when He knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father; it was "because he loved them unto the end, and was come from God, and went to God." Before He left the world, He thus declared why He had come into the world, that His people should have a part with Him, as I have already noticed. By washing their feet, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, He declared that the love which He had for His disciples, while He was with them in the world, would continue after He had left them, and went to God and the glory

that He had with Him before the world was. Washing their feet, with a perfect view of this glory, and a consciousness that He would soon enjoy it, also signified that when in this glory He would continue to wash their feet, according to what He said to Peter: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me”: and “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet”; which we shall afterwards consider.

Dear friends, I now direct your attention to the love of Christ for all who have a part with Him. He shewed this love in coming into the world to save them. While in this world, how great was the love He manifested for His disciples! No afflictions, toils, or sufferings that He endured, ever prevented the exercise of this love; neither did their errors, weaknesses, or defects. One denying, all forsaking Him, did not abate it; it overcame, it continued through all. His hour was now come that He should depart out of this world: death—that death which He had undertaken to endure, that they might live for ever with Him in glory—was before Him, and He viewed it with a full comprehension of its sufferings. Did this present any obstacle to the exercise of His love? No: His was a love stronger than death; and therefore we read in Luke 9:51: “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up [as we read in another place, ‘knowing all things that should come upon him’], he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” He knew that He had there to contend with the powers of darkness, followed by His sufferings, death, and the grave; yet, with a full prospect of all, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. Why? Love urged Him onwards—love for His disciples, for all who have a part with Him. It was His Father’s appointment;

and therefore He said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” It was His own free engagement, expressed in verse 6 of Psalm 40: “Mine ears hast thou opened”: better translated, and as you read it in the margin of some Bibles, “Thou hast digged ears for me.” God the Father digged ears for Christ. What does this signify? That the Father appointed and prepared Christ to hear and obey His will in saving His people in the type of His service for ever.

There is a shade of difference in the case of a Hebrew who preferred serving his master to his liberty, as we read in Exodus 21: a Hebrew servant who had served his master for seven years was then entitled to liberty. The terms of servitude and its termination are there related: if he came in by himself, without wife or children, he should go out by himself; if he was married, then his wife should go out with him; if his master gave him a wife, and she had borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children should be his master’s; but if the servant, who may have his liberty and go out by himself, should plainly say, “I love my master, I love my wife and my children, I will not go out free,” then his master should bore his ear to the door-post, to signify that he was to serve him for ever.

Here, dear friends, is an exact representation of Christ’s love for the church. He might have been for ever free from servitude and go out by Himself; He was not bound (I now speak of Him as God) to suffer and die for sinners; but His Father had given Him a wife and children. You know, that in Scripture the church is described as the wife of Christ, and its members as the children. In Ephesians 5, speaking of marriage, the apostle declares, “This is a great mystery, but I speak

concerning Christ and the church "; and in Hebrews 2, Christ is represented as saying, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me." And, as in the case of the Hebrew servant, who so loved his master and his wife and children that he preferred serving his master to his liberty, from love to his master, to his wife, and children; so did Christ plainly declare to His Father, I will not go out free; I love my Father, I love the church, I love the children; mine ear shall be bored; I will bind myself to that the Father has given me to do and to suffer for their salvation, having taken upon me the form of a servant, assumed their nature, descended into their world, and endured all that is needful to raise them to fellowship with the Father and myself in heavenly glory. This, dear brethren, was the reason that death, and a full apprehension of its sufferings, could not prevent the exercise of Christ's love for His people. I say, He stedfastly beheld it, yet never turned aside from it: floods of anguish overwhelmed Him; they compelled Him to cry out, as we read in Psalm 49: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in the deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying." Did this abate the love which was needed to endure it? Did it here fail? Did He turn aside from the bitter cup? No: these many waters could not drown His love; He drank up the dreadful flood, that His people might be delivered from it: He took their place in suffering, that they might take His place in glory! I say, dear friends, it was in the exercise of this love, and in the prospect of the continuance after He had entered into His glory, that our Head when He knew that He should depart out of this world, girded Himself, and washed His disciples' feet; and this brings us to a

particular consideration of what is signified. As I have already said, It was because they had a part with Him that He washed their feet.

He certainly intended it as a proof and example of humility and condescension. But observe, while He washed their feet, He said unto Peter, “What I do thou knowest not nozos but thou shalt know hereafter.” This proves that by it our Lord signified another washing, also evident from Peter’s saying unto Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” This washing is not the cleansing of their persons, or the pardon of all their sins; as declared by our Lord saying to Peter, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.” Here the entire cleansing of His people is described; they are compared to him who has just left the bath, and is perfectly clean; but we know that his feet might become that moment defiled; and this, dear friends, is precisely our case. I now speak of believers; Christ appears in the presence of God for us. This proves that He has for ever removed all our sins; for this He came into our world and lay in the grave. His resurrection, and now appearing in the presence of God is, I say, a sufficient proof that He has for ever removed from God’s sight all our sins; His blood is in their place; they are washed, born of water and of the Spirit, through which they are clean every whit: but, dear friends, our feet are continually defiled; we live in a defiling world, our earthly nature continues, Satan and the world act on it: what is the consequence? Our mind and conscience are perpetually defiled; not that the guilt of our sins ever returns to the view of God. This cannot be; Christ is ever before Him for us, and His blood is now in the place where our sins were seen. But I say our

sin and its guilt defile our mind and conscience; it troubles us, it obscures the glory to which we are called, it interrupts our communion with God and the blessedness of fellowship with Christ and the Father.

Here is the defilement of our feet, from which we need continual washing; but because we have a part with Christ, though now in His glory, He never ceases to wash our feet. How does He wash them? By removing from our mind and conscience everything that interrupts our communion with God, and its glory and blessedness. We believe that we are admitted to this; but, through the influence of nature and a defiling world, we cannot always enjoy it: everything in our nature, everything in the world, interrupts our fellowship with Christ and the Father, and mars our enjoyment of it. We still believe, we look up, but if the least guilt remains on the conscience we are dazzled, and perplexed; the glory appears too high for us to reach or enjoy. Then how does Christ wash our feet? I say, by delivering us from the consciousness of guilt and its influence: He restores to us a sense of complete pardon; He delivers us from the power of nature and the world; He brings us into unhindered communion with Himself and the Father, and the enjoyment of its glory and blessedness. He again brings down to our apprehension what we are as seen in Him, and enables us to rejoice in it; and thus does He ever continue to wash our feet.

Dear friends, you now see the reason why Christ acted as a servant to His disciples when He was departing out of this world: “He loved them unto the end”; the end, not only of His life on earth, but during His eternal reign in glory. To them, to all who have a part with Him, He is a servant still; He washes their feet, as I have noticed, and

in all His feelings towards them is precisely the same as He was when on earth; no change, no alteration whatever. Did His love for His disciples triumph over every obstacle to its exercise, over all their errors and defects, their defect in attachment to Himself? Such is His present love for all who have a part with Him. Did He bear with all the ignorance, errors, and weaknesses of His disciples, and only notice them to pardon and restore? Thus does He bear with His people now, equally compassionate and ready to supply all their wants. Did He say, “I am among you as he that serveth”? did He actually serve them, pouring water into a basin, and washing their feet, and wiping them with the towel wherewith He was girded? He is the servant of His people still: He washes their feet with the same condescension and love that He felt for His disciples when He was leaving them to depart out of this world. Dear friends, let us ever remember that Christ, though now in His glory, is in all things precisely the same as He was when on earth; present with us at all times to render us the same services. We are one with Him, and He with us; no distinction, no separation, as it respects His sympathy in all that concerns us: “In all their affliction he was afflicted”; “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Hence, after He had ascended and entered into His glory, when Paul persecuted His people, He said unto him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? “He will say, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” In serving His people He considers nothing that affects them unworthy of His notice. He said unto Ananias, “Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus “: He knows the

street and house where His people dwell, that He might there render them all needful services; for this He numbers the hairs of their heads.

Knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, and that He would continue to love and serve His people, it was for this reason Jesus washed His disciples' feet. But why is it said, that when Jesus knew that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, and that the Father had given all things into His hands, He arose from supper and washed the disciples' feet? I say, why did He do this at the prospect of His eternal fellowship with the Father, and His dominion over all things that the Father had given into His hands? Because He knew that in that glory, and possessing power over all things, He would be the servant of His people for ever. How is He to serve them when they are with Him in His heavenly kingdom? By ministering to their happiness and enjoyment. This He Himself declares, as we read in Luke 12. After exhorting His disciples to watch for His coming, He said, "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 sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

Dear friends, here we perceive that Christ will ever be the servant of His people; when they are with Him in His glory He will be unto them all that He was when on earth, so far as they need His services: they will need them only for their enjoyment; and for this, I say, He will always serve His people with the same love and compassion that He felt for His disciples when He washed their feet. His fellowship with the Father, His power over all things that the Father has put into His

hands, He will ever use for making His people perfectly happy. Now He washes their feet by removing from them everything that hinders their enjoyment of fellowship with Himself and the Father; because our earthly nature and all contact with a defiling world continually interrupt this enjoyment. But when we are with Him in His heavenly glory, we shall enjoy unhindered communion with God, and its full and perfect blessedness: to secure it Christ will still serve us. Is it not said, “He shall gird himself and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them”? Yes, He will do this by revealing and imparting unto them all that is needful for their perfect happiness. They shall feast with Him; and in this feast He will serve them, they the guests, and He ministering to their enjoyment. And what a feast will that be! how great the delight which it will afford, when He who is Lord of all supplies, serves, and entertains every one who is admitted into it!

Now, dear friends, you see the reason why Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, when He knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, and that the Father had given all things into His hands. He then began the service which, in another manner, He will fulfil for ever. Now, I say, He washes our feet by removing from us all that defiles our mind and conscience, and hinders our enjoyment of the glory to which He has raised us. Yes; we have fellowship with Him in His present glory, but a defiled mind and conscience interrupt its comfort and blessedness. “God,” says the apostle in Ephesians 2, “hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” I say we now live with Christ in His glory; but

our earthly nature is still in a defiling world. We resemble the priests who served in the court of the temple, and had free admittance to the holy place. They were never removed from their service—why? Because their persons had been washed and arrayed to prepare them for it. No need to repeat this, no renewal of their title to their sacred office. But their hands and feet were continually defiled by the blood of the sacrifices.

Then what must they do? Not depart from their place and office; provision was made for cleansing them. The laver was placed between the brazen altar and the holy place, in which they washed their hands and feet, and then they served in the tabernacle. This, dear brethren, is precisely our case. We are priests, and now dwell with Christ in spirit; for God has raised us together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and He has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father. No alteration in our place and title, no removal from it. Christ has washed us, and we are clean every whit, and therefore we dwell with Him in heaven itself; we are admitted to unhindered communion with Him who is our sacrifice, our altar of incense, our table of shew-bread, our ark of the covenant—all that was in the temple; our hands and feet are continually defiled. What must we do? Precisely what they did—feel that our place with Christ and our title as priests are never altered; for these we have been cleansed and arrayed, and, like the priests in the temple, we have only to wash our feet meanwhile. Christ, I say, dear friends, continues to render us this service. The world and Satan act on our earthly nature. We cannot in any degree come in contact with the world without defilement; for who can touch pitch and not be defiled? But these never move us from

our heavenly place in Christ, nor alter our title as priests unto God and His Father. Christ washes our feet, removes defilement from our minds and conscience, delivers us from the power of these things which cause its defilement; and again we enjoy full fellowship with Him in the holy place into which God has raised us and made us to sit together in Christ Jesus.

Thus, dear friends, have I endeavoured to shew you why our Lord washed the feet of His disciples, knowing that the Father had given all things in His hands. Let us consider the obligation which this presents to His people, according to what we read in the chapter before us. “So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.” How are we to fulfil this? As Christ does in His heavenly glory. I noticed the way in which Christ washed His disciples’ feet, when He was with them in the world. He patiently endured all their infirmities, errors, and defects, that He might intercede for them, and remove from their hearts and minds everything that defiled them. And so in His glory Christ is ever engaged in thus serving His people. And He truly declared, “Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet”; as I said, in the same manner, patiently enduring their ignorance, errors, weaknesses, defects, any defilement that cleaves to them—patiently enduring it, I say, that we might be the means of removing it. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If Christ, now in His glory, is thus engaged, we should think it an honour to resemble Him. How are we to resemble Christ in washing one

another's feet? By endeavouring to remove from our Christian brethren everything that defiles their mind and consciences, and hinders the blessedness of their fellowship with Christ and the Father; bearing their burdens, comforting them in their afflictions, and restoring them to a right mind by affectionate reproof; also, by praying for them. Yes, we should resemble Christ, who is their High Priest, ever restoring, ever interceding for them; by endeavouring, I say, to deliver them from their defilement, to remove their sorrows, and to disengage them from nature and the world by a faithful testimony of their error. We should also pray for them, pray for their deliverance from everything that defiles and troubles them; like our Lord and Master, ever meek, patient, compassionate, and tender in our conduct towards them. This is recommended in Philippians 2: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." The example of Christ is there proposed to us: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant … and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Dear friends, when we consider how little we resemble Christ in His humility, and in all that He did and is now doing as the servant of His people, we cannot wonder that the apostle said, "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state; for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Why are we disinclined to resemble Christ in His services to His disciples? Because we so faintly apprehend the glory in

which He now reigns. Observe, dear friends, the prospect of His soon enjoying this glory is said to be the reason that Christ girded Himself and washed His disciples' feet; He knew that when in this glory He would continue what He meant by the service. He rejoiced at it; it was part of the joy set before Him; and therefore, I say, He washed the disciples' feet. We see but little of the glory of Christ, and of our glory in having a part with Him; and for this reason we are not inclined to imitate and obey our Lord and Master in washing one another's feet. As we behold this glory, and enjoy it, so will be our inclination and pleasure to fulfil the lowest service for His disciples. For in truth, the services that I mean are the highest; because they make us like Him who washed His disciples' feet, who now serves them in all which it signified, and will be their servant for ever. Observe, then, dear friends, our Lord's declaration: "If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." The Lord bless His word, and enable us all to obey Him.

Before I conclude, let me say a word to those who may not yet have experienced any of the services of Christ. To you, dear friends, I present Him as a Saviour; if you see and feel your separation from God, because your sins interpose between you and Him, believe in Christ, and your sins will be removed from the sight of God, and then you will enjoy all the present and future glory and blessedness of those who have a part with Christ. Your sins, whatever they may be, are no obstacle to your enjoyment of this glory. If all the sins that ever were committed in the world were congregated in your persons and were your own act, this need not prevent your believing in Christ, and coming unto God through

Him. Christ bore in His own body on the tree the sins of all who believe in Him; and now lives in the presence of God for them. I say, whatever be their sins, though great as the sin of His murderers, for even these He pardoned. Believe in Him, dear friends, and you will enjoy all His services, and reign with Him in His glory. The Lord bless what has been said to all who hear me, and to Him be all praise. Amen.

God For Us

Romans 8:31

There is much to weary us, dear brethren, much to draw out our anxiety as to present circumstances here; and there is much as regards the natural mind which shrinks at meeting God. The natural conscience of a man, even while he is engaged in the things of this life, often testifies to him that all is not right: he may not always, perhaps not often, feel this silent monitor; business, pleasure, gratification, may dissipate the thought that there is something coming which he is not prepared for. But though unwelcome, the thought will obtrude, and weary him, and make him uneasy, particularly if he is externally seeking righteousness; he will be very weary to find he has not courage to meet what he knows he cannot avoid. Nay, even he who disclaims all outward regard to what is right, who is on the broad road of sin and ruin, delighting himself in abounding iniquity, even in his very heyday of enjoyment and sport, an uneasy thought will at some time or another be felt which tells him, This won’t do, this is not the end for which I was made; there is something coming. Perhaps he may not experience this while in the very act of his jovial pleasures; but when alone, a word that has been dropped, either in a discourse or a conversation, or something he has read, or a passing circumstance, will force him to acknowledge, Well, after all, that is the truth, whether I believe it or not; this short life must end in a coming judgment, and I am not prepared for it.

This feeling of uneasiness and alarm will obtrude on the mind, whether we view the individual as seeking to

justify himself at the approaching day of account, or whether we see him as delighting in the manifested wickedness of his heart. In the one case, he feels his wants, but is looking for strength where it cannot be found, and, making no progress, is very uneasy; and in the other, the very thought of a God who hates the things he is doing every hour in the day, is a thought fraught with alarm. Now I suppose there is no person who has heard the gospel preached, who has not, at one time or another, been made thus uneasy, whether he is seeking what he looks upon as a means of justification from himself, or whether he is seeking for what he esteems its own present value, present enjoyment in sin. This leads him to the consideration of one great thing which in some moment of time he experiences: Well, perhaps after all, God may be against me. It is this that makes the sinner alarmed; and he whose conscience is greatly troubled, who feels his weakness, and finds the difficulty by which he is surrounded, his secret feeling is, God is not at peace with me—He is against me. There is the great truth, the great cause of controversy in the conscience, there is no peace. No matter what are his circumstances, they may vary and change, but will make no change in what makes him thus uneasy: for it is the same calm unchanging God he has to meet, and he is conscious that that God is not at peace with him, and he cannot say, I know, come what will, God is for me.

It is this that makes the natural conscience tremble and feel uneasy. There are many under similar experience, even by the teaching of God’s Spirit, and are deeply conscious of their not being at peace with God, and continue thus in suffering till God reveals Himself. But I am not now speaking of them, but of those whose

natural conscience leads them to know that God is not for them. The Scripture tells us, and the conscience when once enlightened sees, that God met all this in a manner peculiar to Himself—that He met all that a man's conscience can make out against himself, and met it in such a way as to make a man conscious of possessing peace in the Lord Jesus Christ: and it is really wonderful—wonderful beyond our utmost limits of comprehension—when, amidst all our misery, degradation, sinfulness, and weakness, God is found to be for us.

"What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" When a man sees God thus settling the question between them, suiting Himself to his peculiar circumstances, and proving Himself to be for him, he has a more realising sense of God's love, and of God's favour towards him, than the angels in heaven who never sinned. When a man is brought to see God for him, there is a breaking down of all that before opposed itself to God: pride, the poor pride of man, is brought down, when once he is brought to the conscious acknowledgment, "God is for us." The soul then sees how completely everything is for him, if God is thus for us. The comfort of the soul consists in this, that God is for it, and that it is for God: then it begins to be conscious of other wants, of which before it knew nothing; it wants to know more of God, it wants to see Him as He is, it wants the glory. It is a comfort to know that that is what it wants. The soul is led to ask now, Why should God be for us? have we been for God? have we rendered God any service? have we acted by His mind? We have not. Why then should we plead, God is for us? It is for nothing in ourselves, for we have

slighted His promises, despised His grace, lightly esteemed the more than ten thousand mercies of His daily favour.

We have been like the prodigal son, who wasted his very common blessings in riotous living. In all our circumstances we have forgotten Him, in our intercourse with the world we have been acting without Him, loving our ungodly companions rather than Him. O, the wonder, if after all this we should find God was for us! Look at the state man is really in, as regards the trust he puts in man rather than God. If his neighbour should ask him to do anything, though his conscience may tell him God hates what his neighbour wants him to do, still, rather than disoblige his companion, he will sin against God. It would distress him more to refuse him, either in going to ungodly places of amusement, or gratification, or indulging in known sin. Sin was the cause of the rejection of Christ; and therefore every sin has this stamped upon it— the rejection of the Son of God. Our own conscience tells us that sin is against God, and there are few so hardy as to confess that they were for God by the commission of it; and yet, we may say, there is scarcely one among us who is not conscious of this sin, of (rather than refusing our friend or companion) doing what we know is against God. Seeing such to be the case, we see no reason why God should be for us. His judgments have been disregarded, His mercies despised, His name lightly esteemed, little or no notice taken of any temporal favour, except to abuse it; and must not this bring to our conscience the upbraiding thought, Why should we expect God to be for us? What has the world done for God? What has it done with its natural blessings? Sinned them away. With the law of

God? Broken it. With the love of Christ and His coming? Rejected Him. With the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the work of Christ? Refused it—takes no pleasure in anything belonging to God, sees no glory, no loveliness, no beauty in Him, which just proves this one thing, that there is no real reason from us on earth why God should be for us, but, as far as we are concerned, every reason why He should be against us.

In this state of entire alienation from God, neither seeing nor desiring to see His glory and loveliness, there can be no love in the soul, as long as that soul is living without God, and it has manifestly no interest in the things of God. Being in this position, there is one terrible evil necessarily evident: that if we are living without God, and not following Him, we must be followers of Him who is the enemy of God and of our souls: who is the great deceiver of mankind, and, though he never shews himself, drags his victim down to ruin, and then mocks at his calamity. This is Satan, that arch-deceiver, who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning; who casts out his bait to decoy man, shewing him that, but carefully hiding the hook, that he may have his unresisting prey in his clutches; and man rushes to take the bait, willingly selling himself to Satan, though he is morally conscious that he is not acting according to the commandments of God. And this is not said of any one particular class of character or order of men, for all are included in it: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” There is nothing that can meet the glory of God in all this.

There is one great thing as regards unrenewed man: he stands in dread of the holiness of God; he cannot contemplate God’s glory with delight, but in that glory

he must stand if ever he is saved; he may be changed, and he must be changed, if ever he meet it with joy; but that glory changes not. The sun is just as bright when earth obstructs our view of it, as when we behold it; clouds may intervene and hide its glory, but when the clouds are taken away, there is the sun just the same, just as bright, as warm, as glorious as ever; and the moment the veil is taken away, we see it as such. Where is the soul that can stand in the presence of the glory of God, and contemplate that glory in his sullied and natural mind? “Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? “A child, in order to see the natural light, must previously be brought into life; and so must we, for God cannot change. Were it possible for God to give up one atom of His glory, or one particle of His holiness, the effect would be that there would be no place where sin would not enter. Who can tell what would be the consequence if God could suffer the least diminution of His glory? Where is the spot that would then be sacred? where would be the place of unfading glory? But God’s glory cannot be lessened or diminished, and what secures it is the unchangeable nature of God Himself. It is this, and the consciousness of it, that brings uneasiness and alarm into the soul unchanged by grace; for it is conscious of its unfitness for that glory, that this glory is far removed from what he loves, and that therefore we must feel convinced that God is not for us. If it be really true that God’s glory cannot change, who then can be saved? The believer sees it an unchangeable glory, and it delights him. The unbeliever is conscious it must be so, and he is angry: If God be thus, he thinks, why should I have anything to do with Him? He struggles, but unavailingly, to get away from God; he would be glad

then that there had been no God: he has no objection to receive God's earthly favours and blessings, sending rain on the just and on the unjust; but, provided he could have what he likes on earth, and the enjoyment of it, he would not care ever to see God, or His glory either.

It is not, it cannot be, pleasant to the natural mind to contemplate the judgment. No man likes to be judged; it is not natural to man; he does not like to have this sounded in his ears: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment": that is the fact, and therefore he is always putting it off. Putting what off? God's presence. He does not want to see God; and is not this practically testifying that he is not at peace with God, that there is something which keeps him still desiring to be kept from God?

It is sorrow, brethren, it is grief, to dwell so long on this subject. There is no comfort in it, did we see nothing further than this. It is sorrow to have to dwell on it; but it is the truth, it is God's truth, that we are sinners, and, as sinners, are averse to God's glory. But, brethren, it is another and a blessed truth that is brought home to the heart of a sinner, when, notwithstanding all this, he finds to his joy and comfort that God is for him. Adam sinned and left God, because he thought more of what Satan offered him; he thought the devil a better friend to him than God: but he has since found out to his cost that the devil was a liar: that he never had the power of giving him what he promised; and that by catching at the devil's baits, he has received his hook, and that "the wages of sin is death." This is what man has done. But, oh! the blessedness of the consciousness that, in spite of all we can do, or Satan devise, the blessing is ours, the

glory is ours! We come to see the truth that has risen out of this great truth.

The fact turns out quite a different way, when the Holy Spirit is bringing home to our souls that all the time God is for us. O what blessing, what wondrous blessing, is thus brought home to the poor, aching, harassed, anxious soul, when it is given to see that that God whom it despised, that Jesus whom it crucified, that Spirit whom it resisted, are for it! O what gladness to receive daily proofs, that it is one upon whom God is looking in love, in pity, and that He is for it! as the Lord, speaking of the children of Israel, says, “I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, and I am come down to deliver them!” O what wondrous extent of love! nor height nor depth can reach or fathom it! We are frail men, and Satan exercises his subtlety on us; he knows what to lure us with, and therefore he puts suitable pleasures in our way, and within our reach; he throws his baits most skilfully; he knows the bait that is most seasonable, and he presents it just in the time and under the circumstances most likely to take effect. He knows what our natures like, what they are going after; and so he presents the very thing which, if continued in, must lead to destruction. All this is terrible, dear friends; but under all this there is comfort—the everlasting comfort, if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we have seen and found One who is able to bear us through all this, and set us free from the power and dominion of Satan, making us children of the living God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

In this blessed privilege ends all the argument which Paul brings forward in this epistle; he shews them what they are by nature; they did not like to retain God in

their knowledge, and so God gave them over to a reprobate mind (that is, a mind incapable of sound judgment in the exercise of what was right or wrong), and the consequence was, they committed all uncleanness with greediness. But “in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Dear brethren, this is the thing that brings comfort and peace and joy to the soul; this is what sets the devil aside; this is what brings a man to cease from loving to sin against God, from rejecting Christ, or refusing the testimony of the Holy Spirit. This is the effect of having this blessed knowledge brought home to the soul; and what a relief it is, after many sad experiences of deeper and deeper misery in the consciousness of sin and anxiety, to be released from it.

An individual under a sense of his own unworthiness looks upon others whom the Lord has enabled to act for Him, with a kind of jealousy, and he says, Oh, if I were like such a one, if I acted as consistently and godly as he does! I do not know how he does it; but it is not so with me: I cannot act as he does. God is just bringing him by all this to acknowledge, I am ungodly; and then God says, Yes, you are ungodly; but “in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” How, in due time? It was just in due time for us, for we were lost, ruined, had sinned away our blessings, and were without strength, and then Christ died; yea, Christ died for the ungodly. O, what blessed intelligence for poor sinners! “God spared not his own Son”; He gave Him up for the ungodly, for sinners; for those who have no strength, who are without knowledge. Then none are excluded from the privilege, who will plead they are the ungodly; and this is so simple as to be as intelligible to the poor and ignorant as to the rich and wise, and perhaps even more

intelligible, and for this very reason, that they are poor and ignorant, and that they are dealing with God in their consciences only, and the others are endeavouring to deal with Him by their knowledge. But God, who is rich in mercy, can bring to nothing the wisdom of the wise, and make them see their want of wisdom.

When the Spirit of God brings to the soul of a sinner this conviction, that he is ungodly, and that he has an interest in the death of the Son of God, he is conscious of being in Him also as a risen Saviour, and has therefore ample encouragement to look to the future. He sees One by faith come down from heaven; he sees God determined to save him, and in such a way as comes home to his heart, by sending His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. By faith he is witnessing what Jesus was doing here, and how He was used. He had a purpose, a holy purpose of love, which He came to execute here, and nothing could divert Him from that purpose. He was pledged to perform it, and therefore on He went, amidst all scorn, reproach, poverty, and contempt. The settled purpose of His heart was to save the ungodly, and so He despised all that was in the way of its accomplishment; He despised the cross,' enduring the shame. The laugh of man, the scorn of sinners, was against Him; but what was that to Him? The one thing for which He came down was before Him, and so He went through all, perfectly sinless, and yet unjustly accused; and not only accused, traduced, ridiculed, and spit upon, but brought into the very dust of death. When once the believer enters into the spiritual apprehension of these acknowledged facts, then does he learn that this holy and much-dreaded God is for him—is on his side—has taken his part; then the spring of hope is lifted up in his soul; then he sees it is

God for him, and not against him; that it is God, and not man is for him. It was God did all this, and He is for me. He is now no longer too proud to be a debtor to God; the arms of his rebellion and enmity are laid down; he becomes a suppliant; he no longer need dread, as a sinner, to appear before God, knowing, as he does, God's loving-kindness in Christ Jesus; he no longer need fear the day of judgment, nor be troubled, for his cause is made out, and he stands acquitted.

This is the great truth that brings joy, peace, and comfort, that in all these things God is for us! O what rest, what happiness for the poor soul, when he sees he has to do with One who has conquered all enemies for him, and in whom he has treasured up all glory for him! Before he came to the consciousness of this, the book of his daily transgressions appeared to ascend up before God, black with the catalogue of his offences, on every leaf of which was written—Sin, sin, sin; but now these blackened characters are effaced, and on each page is transcribed in letters of blood, in the blood of God's dear Lamb—Love, love, love. All the dark spots are now obliterated, for He who is for us has triumphed. He took the load of sin from off us, and suffered the punishment due to the commission of it, and this silences all Satan's accusations. Satan says to the soul, Oh, you are a sinner, you have broken God's laws. The Lord Jesus Christ acknowledges this, takes the sin, and bears the punishment of it unto death. Satan requires the right of judgment to be passed against us, that the Lord in justice ought not to let the sinner go unjudged; he accused him. But "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth." Christ has taken the sinner's place, borne the punishment instead of us,

poured out His soul unto death, and thus put away sin. He now is risen, and has ascended into heaven. Thus is sin expiated, and His people clear; thus is Christ proved for us.

To enter into the full perception of this blessedness constitutes the enjoyment of the believer. Here he finds a resting-place from the buffeting waves of the world, when he thus sees that, as sinners, God has proved Himself for us, and in the very act He commends His love towards us; for it was while we were such sinners, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We see just two things in this—that the sinner is without strength, without riches. Like the poor prodigal, he has spent all he had, and now he comes to himself, and is about to return, he has nothing to bring with him. Like a shipwrecked mariner, all is thrown overboard, everything going adrift, and he himself, struggling with the dark billows, is just cast ashore, wearied and poor, having nothing! but, blessed be God, if we have got to shore, God is there, and He is for us; and this is the mighty point gained, and we know we shall not be cast out again, and that we may lay claim now to all things that God can give. "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?"

Then, brethren, let us trust Him more; let us seek to get more from Him; we cannot look for too much of His favour who has not spared His Son for us: and this, dear brethren, will not lead to presumptuous expectations, but a sense of the greatness of His gifts will keep us humble; and the more deeply we are humbled, the more we are in a state to see and feel how God was and is for us, that Christ bled and died for us as enemies, and that

the Father gave His Son for us when we were ungodly. O brethren, this is a blessed sight for faith, and nothing but faith can see it, and seeing this we can see everything is ours. Having Christ, we have all. “How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” God has bestowed unnumbered blessings on man; but there was one thing which He had in heaven greater than all His other gifts: that one gift He gave, and having given this, shall He, or can He, refuse us anything else that is for our good? Christ is ours, and then it follows, all is ours; “for ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” God, therefore, gives us all things with Christ; not as man gives, for God gives freely—” He freely giveth us all things.” The difficulties in our way may continue. Satan may still endeavour to distress and annoy; but we may be well assured, that if God has given us His Son, He has given us all things that will bring us through. He has fitted us for the undertaking, and when once put in order, set off, and set a-going by the power of God, we may be satisfied as to the issue, for Christ has engaged to see us through; we must arrive safely, for God, who has brought us thus far, is still for us; and who shall separate us from His love? “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? “Shall the deceitful pleasures of a false world, or the alluring baits of Satan tempt our souls to destruction? Nay, brethren, “in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.” Be our way dark or thorny, be it difficult or dangerous, be it in the midst of temptations or cares, the same God is for us, and we know that He went through them before us. Christ suffered, He was tempted, upbraided; wept and made supplication, and brought us through them all, even with groanings and tears, to look up to God as our

Father, and heaven as our home: what have we to do with fear then?

Brethren, beloved of the Lord, seeing that our God has done such great things for us, we know that God is for us, by the love of Jesus, in going before us in all tribulations, so that nothing should separate us from His love. If you are tempted, dear friends, remember He was tempted before you; if your friends forsake you, remember that Christ is a “friend that sticketh closer than a brother”; the world may leave you, but it is not your friend, but your enemy, “for the friendship of the world is enmity with God”; and you are no longer debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh, but you live in the Spirit, and therefore should walk in the Spirit, in the same mind that was in Jesus. Whatever temptation you are under, be persuaded, with Paul, of this one thing, that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What the devil did was to undo our confidence in God: what Jesus did is to shew us that we may trust Him. And when the believer sees not this, he is looking to the devil and his temptation more than to the love and power of Christ, who has conquered all his enemies for him; but when our eyes are off all other objects, and on Christ, then, and then only, we can have peace.

Now,- dear friends, I would just, in conclusion, ask you, Have you been led to come, as you are, ungodly sinners, to God? not to bring your own righteousness, which is nothing but filthy rags; but have you come pleading the

blood-shedding of the Lamb of God? If you have, assuredly there is peace for you, for that is a sure token that God is for you. Or have you been acting against God all your lives, and have never found peace? Are you still tormented with a guilty conscience, and are you still rejecting and refusing the way of salvation? I would earnestly beseech you to consider the danger you are in, and I would ask you to look before you, and see where you are going, and what you are doing. You are wandering in the midst of the wide sea of this world, you are toiling through its waves without a prospect of deliverance; and if persisted in, you will, ere long, sink down into the sleep of death, to wake in eternal misery. Should you be found thus when Christ comes, you will feel, to your shame and grief, that there is One against you greater than Satan, who can destroy both him and you.

But be of good cheer if your hearts are set on Christ: there is your stay, the anchor of your soul. If He is such, dear friends, stand forward for Him; be not ashamed to own your relationship to Him, your dependence on Him: be decided, cut short all expedients for deferring the bold acknowledgment of your being His; confess Him before men, and act for Him, and live for Him in an ungodly world. He is not ashamed to call you brethren; and will you be ashamed to confess Him as your Lord and Master in the face of all the world? Be not debating within yourselves, when you shall avow yourselves; do it at once, decidedly. Make the plunge, and trust God for the consequence. I know it by experience, that an open bold confession of being Christ’s is more than half the struggle over. I know the devil tempts, and says, O do not be too hasty, you might ruin the cause by over-

forwardness; this is not the time to confess yourself openly, wait for another opportunity. But I say, dear friends, as one who knows, that if a man, in the strength of the Lord, is just brought to say to his companions and friends, I am Christ's, and I must act for Him— that he will not suffer what others will feel who are creeping on fearful and afraid to avow Him whom they desire to serve. Believe me, my friends, it is as I say: by this decided and open opposition to the world he may at first be laughed at and mocked; but what of that? Christ was served so. But soon, when his companions find him resolute, they will give him up as a bad case which they can make no hand of, and they will leave him comparatively free from ridicule.

Are there any of you who are thus halting between two opinions, and afraid to confess your obligations to the Lord? Oh! I once more entreat you to be candid. Be open, be decided, confess Christ's name on earth, and He will not be ashamed to confess your name before the whole assembled universe.

Jesus, The Resurrection And The Life

John 11:25

This chapter presents in the most striking manner the perfect sympathy of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the trials and vicissitudes of His people, even in the sufferings which death brings, and displays the Lord's power and love conspicuous over death. It shews us what the energy, the utmost energy, of evil can do over those who are even the beloved of the Lord; but it also shews us how the Lord Jesus sets it altogether aside in the energy and in the strength of His own power.

We have here the full result of Satan's power, and the perfect triumphing of the Lord over that power. Death is the result of the power of Satan. By bringing in sin, he brought in death: "the wages of sin is death"; this is the utmost of Satan's power. He brought in this at the commencement, he brought it in by deceit; for "he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth." Such has he been ever since; he is called the old serpent and the deceiver; and having deceived, he became the murderer of the first Adam, and, in one sense, of the second Adam. He was and is a liar: that is his character, as exactly opposed to Christ, who is the truth. In like manner all the variations of his character are set in opposition to that of Christ: he is the destroyer, and Christ is the giver of life; he is the accuser of the brethren, and Christ the Mediator for them; Christ the truth of God, and Satan the father of lies. In this character he is first brought before us. By misrepresenting the truth and character of God, he became the murderer of the souls of men, and brought

in death—this was his power. Christ came to destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. The devil murdered souls by falsifying the truth of God. Here we learn his subtlety—presenting falsehood and death through the medium of the truth of God in part; and thus, from being a liar, he becomes a murderer.

Men are not aware of the depths of deceit practised by Satan; his plan is not to bring forward at once a broad intelligible falsehood, which carries the lie on the very face of it. Not so, brethren; he puts it forward under the guise of truth, in the form of truth, and in some sense mixed up with the truth. It was in this way he deceived Adam; he wanted him to eat the fruit which God had forbidden him; and how does he proceed? He says indeed, “Ye shall not surely die! “Now there was a palpable untruth; but he adds, “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”: and this we know in part was the real truth, for immediately we hear God saying, “The man is become as one of us to know good and evil.” Here we see the lie presented partly in the form of truth: but the truth which was most necessary for man to know, this he kept away entirely, namely, the consequences which would result from the man’s taking his advice: this he did not, this he does not, make known to him. He does not tell him it will end in death. This is the way Satan presents his destructive baits, not by simply telling falsehood, but so mixing it up with the truth as to destroy the very soul of man, thus from a liar becoming a murderer. Thus has he brought in the power of evil, the extent of which power is death: “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

Now all this the energy of the Lord has met in a superior power, which we shall presently see. Satan attempts to

meet the power of the Lord Jesus, and to set up his power in opposition to the Lord's. We have an exhibition of it in the case of Job, a favoured servant of God, which was, doubtless, permitted for our learning as well as for Job's profit. We learn from this history how much Satan could bring to play against Job, and the circumscribing of that power by the almighty power of God. We are told, "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? And Satan said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Observe, brethren, when Satan is described as going "to and fro in the world," "going about seeking whom he may devour" —under such circumstances we have need of great caution. But let the saints of God feel it is a permitted power, circumscribed, restrained, and subdued at God's will.

In the case of Job we find God saying with authority and permission to Satan, "Behold, all that he hath is in thy power: only upon himself put not forth thy hand." Here was the limitation of the permission; Satan could get no more. He goes to work at once: we read that" Job's oxen were ploughing, and his asses feeding, and the Sabeans came and took them away, and slew his servants." Again, "fire came down from heaven, and burned up his sheep, and his servants, and consumed them. The Chaldeans came upon the camels, and carried them away, and slew the servants." And lastly "Satan brought a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house in which his children were feasting, and killed them all." Here we see the wonderful extent of the power of Satan, but the further extent of the

absolute power of God over the power of Satan; for the limitation was, “But on himself put rot forth thine hand.”

Job therefore was invulnerable, his person could not be touched. But after this we have Satan’s power further extended by the almighty power of God, but still with a boundary which he could not pass: He allowed his body to be afflicted by the power of Satan: “but,” says the Lord, “save his life.” Immediately we hear of Job being covered with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, but his life was spared; and when his afflictions had done the work for which the Lord permitted them, they were removed; for we hear, “The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning.”

Thus blessedly do we see the extent of the power of God over the utmost power of Satan! Many instances of a similar nature might be adduced. We have one in the case of legion, the man in whom were many demons. The power of the living God was acknowledged by these: they were conscious of His superior authority. We learn how far Satan’s power extended in the case of this poor man, to what a dreadful extent it was permitted. He wore no clothes, he abode in the tombs night and day, cutting himself with stones: no man could bind him, no fetter could keep him; but God kept him. Therefore he was still in the wilderness in the way of mercy, therefore he was not driven down into the deep; he would then have been out of the reach of grace, but his God had not so ordered it, He would not have it so, and therefore the utmost extent of Satan’s power could not accomplish that.

Again, we see in Zechariah 3 the futility of Satan's power against those whom Jesus is engaged to defend. Here we view Satan as the accuser of the brethren, endeavouring thus in opposition to meet the priestly character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joshua, a type of Israel, stands before the angel of the Lord, and Satan stands as his accuser, bringing forward his accusations, which might be truth, which might be real, which were so in some sense; but, having been put aside by almighty grace, the accusations are unacknowledged by the Lord as available to his condemnation: the Lord refutes them all with this appeal: "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" In this we have the contrast of office between the Lord Jesus and Satan; one the accuser, having the power of death, the other the priestly intercessor, the giver of life; one the liar from the beginning, the other the eternal Truth. Satan's effort here is to keep the world from the power of Him who is the Prince of life, and he exercises that power over the children of disobedience.

The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil by bringing souls from the power of Satan to the power of the living God. Observe the way the devil acquired his usurped power over man in the first Adam by presenting evil under the semblance of the truth. Man trusted to his own wisdom, and so permitted Satan to possess this power over him; man became spiritually dark, and Satan is the ruler of the darkness of this world; and how does he rule? By the same way he acquired his dominion over man—not by presenting evil in its own hideous garb; but in a plausible, insinuating manner he presents things to be desired to make one wise; and if man is really led to escape his wily snares, he must consent to become a fool

in the world's estimation, and to feel that he is such in his own. We find the terrible result sin has wrought is death. Such was the threatened punishment: "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Man ate, and so sold himself to him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Now Christ has manifested Himself as the Prince of life; and Satan, in opposition thereto, endeavours to blind the minds of all, "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." And further, when their eyes have been opened, and they have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope laid before them, he would, if it were possible, hinder all comfortable enjoyment of God's presence, all sensible communion with God through the operation of the Holy Spirit, and would dim and darken the path of every child of God, attempting to meet the priestly office of Christ, as Intercessor, by his accusations, and to oppose the testimony of the Spirit in the soul by his own dark counsels. But, to oppose all this artillery of power, we have Jesus passed into the heavens, ever living to make intercession for us at the right hand of God, and in the energy of the Holy Ghost dwelling within us we are enabled to maintain a successful though trying warfare with his temptations within.

The interesting history recorded in this chapter demonstrates indisputably the power of the Lord Jesus in setting aside the utmost power of Satan, in the entire overcoming of that by which Satan shewed his triumph over man. Death was this power; but here we have total subjection of that power to a superior power, to exercise which, in the person of Lazarus, Jesus came to Bethany. Martha, Lazarus's sister, said to Jesus, "Lord, if thou

hadst been here my brother had not died; but I know, that even now, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again." The commandment had gone forth at the beginning, when it was said to Adam, "Ye shall die"; that power had been felt and acknowledged, and there was no setting it aside; there was no power to put it away, even in the case of those whom the Lord loved, but by a power such as sent forth the commandment at the first. By that power alone can death be intercepted, even by the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. Jesus says to Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha replies, "I know that he shall rise in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die: believest thou this?"

There are two ways in which the Lord Jesus has become the resurrection and the life of His people: first, in purchasing their redemption from the wages of sin, having paid the full price to eternal justice for their transgressions by His voluntary and substituted sufferings; and also in respect of their oneness with Him who is the very life of all being. We have here the direct personal application of this power to Himself: "I am the resurrection and the life"; but we see in what sense He here alludes to His power of raising His creatures. There is something special here: a something which meets not the circumstances of every one; it is definitely applied to them that believe: "He that believeth." It is, therefore, not applicable to all; and what a recognition of the truth of a special resurrection this is—of the release from

death of all that shall believe in Jesus. That makes all the difference— “because I live, ye shall live also,” alluding to those who believe in Him. They are the children of the resurrection, which blessing flows from their union with Jesus by the indwelling of the Spirit of life; as it is written, “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

Here then we have the peculiar, the special, cause of this difference: they are the children of God, therefore the children of the resurrection; they stand in altogether another character from the children of this world. All shall rise certainly at the coming day of retribution, but it is quite different from the quickening power of life, communicated in virtue of the oneness of the saint with Jesus. Every knee shall certainly bow to Him; be they godly, or be they earthly, or be they the power of darkness; whether they be angels, or principalities, or powers, all shall acknowledge Him when He appears. This was just the witness which the devil gave of His power when he came on earth—” Art thou come to torment us before the time?” Plainly then there is a time set apart, of which they are conscious, when full judgment will be executed on them. “They besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep,” or abyss. Though devils, possessing the power of such, they recognised One before whom they quailed. There is a time coming when He, before whom they even then quailed, will bind them in everlasting chains no more to rove about. This almighty power they even then recognised in the Person of Jesus Christ, when apparently in weakness; therefore they exclaim, under

the conscious terror of His power, Do not torment us before the time! Do not command us to go into the pit! He is Lord of all, and His authority extends to, and shall be exerted over, the ungodly, as well as His saints; in the resurrection all are then brought out of the power of Satan. But the resurrection of which Christ here speaks is peculiar to His own, when He says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” “I know,” said Martha, “that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” But what comfort could that bring, as regarded the bare fact of his rising, for so would the most ungodly sinner rise then? But the blessedness is this, that where Christ is made the life of the soul, there is the certainty of a resurrection to life eternal in Christ’s life; when the life of Jesus comes in, there is that within over which the power of Satan is unable to prevail.

We find, in the occurrences of this beautiful chapter, that it was during the bodily absence of the Lord from Lazarus that death had its power; so it is with us now. This family scene is a type of wonderful things to the church: in the absence of her Lord she feels the power of Satan and death— bodily death seizes on her members; but it shall not always be thus, for Christ shall visit His afflicted family, and when that occurs His very presence will be the power of life. Here is the great secret: Christ’s presence gives spiritual life; and His bodily presence not only raises the dead bodies, but by that presence the further power of death is arrested and interrupted and put aside for ever, as regards His saints; and according as His presence is felt, so is the power of Satan and the power of death set aside. In His absence is grief, but when He comes, He shall put away both grief and its cause. Now, He may and does allow

temptations, and permit the exhibition of the power of Satan in such; but even now He makes Himself known in spirit as stronger than Satan, quickening the soul, and giving life to His people; sorrow, grief, and distress are here occasioned by Satan, particularly this character of sorrow, brought forward in this narrative before us.

Christ communicates life and liberty to His people; therefore He says, “I am the life.” Though there may be still occasion of death in the world, yet when Christ comes and exhibits Himself, His very presence, which before spiritually quickened the soul, will now be powerful to quicken the mortal body, and clothe it with a glorious immortality: “He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall be live.” And He will resuscitate the bodies of those that are dead, and arrest the further progress of death: “He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” The consequence of Christ’s being present in spirit is now life and liberty: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”; so, when present in person, all bondage, grief, or sorrow is vanished. He shews us now in spirit, what He will shortly do in person, when the whole power of Satan is set aside. The moment Christ says, I am here, the power of death is gone; when spiritually, it is spiritually gone; for where Jesus has quickened a soul by communicating His life, there His presence has removed us from all the results of Satan’s power in the soul; the power of the prince of the air has been superseded by the power of the Prince of life: the believer shall be under no power of death as to its results, being translated into another position by the life-giving power of Christ. He that is quickened is quickened unto spiritual and everlasting life—now in spirit, then in person; it is an inseparable connection.

The power of bodily death will not be manifested in all: for we are told in i Thessalonians that some shall be alive when the Lord comes: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up,” etc. Also, in 1 Corinthians 15 it is positively said, “We shall not all sleep,” for that some shall be alive at His coming; consequently they never can die, as He says Himself: “He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” The presence of Christ naturally induces the absence of death: he that is dead when Christ comes shall be raised; and he that is alive shall be changed, thus unqualifiedly by His presence setting the power of death aside. The certainty of this resurrection is consequent upon the vital union of the believer with the Lord Jesus Christ, which, therefore, none can experience but such as are united to Him by a living faith. It is quite a distinct thing from the resurrection of those who shall be called out by the word of His power; His very presence vivifies the believer in virtue of his being made a partaker of the divine nature.

It is with this presence then that the believer has to do; it is for this he is looking. The child of God earnestly longs to enter into the perception of this power, which Christ has spent the travail of His soul to accomplish for him, in order that He may undo the very existence of Satan’s power both in body and soul. He has triumphed over the power of Satan in the soul of every sinner who believes in Him—He shall triumph in their bodies also. “I am the resurrection,” He says, as well as “the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall

never die: believest thou this?" It is not simply saying, Men die, and then I raise them again; but the very power that wrought over them to death yields to His presence both spiritually and personally. Christ, as the first-fruits, rose to shew the certainty of His people's resurrection; then they which are Christ's at His coming shall rise, when shall be fulfilled the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Here is what the enlightened soul is led to look for, the exercise of Christ's power over the utmost power of Satan. If the Spirit testifies within us of the energy of the life of Christ, in the conscious power of His quickening the soul, we have by that the certain evidence that our bodies must also be quickened; for, having made a new man within, think ye, will the Lord suffer it always to occupy an unredeemed body, liable to the power of death and corruption?

But it is not yet a quickened body: that we feel, most sadly feel. We are then led to ask, Since it is so, to what use can this mortal body be converted here, since it does not yet partake of incorruptibility? The only use, dear friends, to which we should convert it is, to make it become a servant to the Saviour. Let the very instruments of corruption minister to godliness: "Yield your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." There is no bondage in this, dear friends; it is perfect freedom; it is the liberty of the child of God, of one who is quickened, made alive, rescued from slavery, made a new man. Satan wars against the dominion of this new life; but there is no charge that he brings that the Lord at all acknowledges, for the believer stands accepted in the Beloved. The Lord Jesus Christ exercises His priestly office in opposition to the reasonings and

accusations of Satan against the saint. Satan brings forward the failings of the old man—the very things which he suggested to the mind, the very sins which by his suggestion the flesh acted out. These he endeavours to press on the conscience, bringing forward the old man, and saying, That is you! and if this is not resisted with a “Get thee behind me, Satan,” then we allow him to interfere with our comfort.

But, blessed truth! “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,” “and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” The Spirit presents Christ in His priestly office, as having undertaken and accomplished all for the believer; but until the whole body, as well as the soul, is quickened with the life of Jesus, we cannot fully enter into the blessedness of so glorious a liberty: but then we shall manifestly see our entire triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil, and enter into the full perception of that comforting truth, “Because I live, ye shall also.” Still, recognising no good in the flesh, we get peace and comfort by simply resting on the promise of Jesus, that He will change our vile bodies, and make them like unto His glorious body; and that, in the meantime, “sin shall not have dominion over us.” The devil would hinder this peace if he could, and seek to do so by entering into controversy with the conscience, and introducing doubts and difficulties, which are encouraged and not repelled, when we are not apprehending Christ in His office of continual Mediator and Intercessor; but we are strengthened, and Satan’s power is humbled, when we are looking up in faith, as united to Jesus, and seeing Him, as “the resurrection and the life,” directing us in the prospect of that day when His glory shall be revealed, and when we shall be

placed in a proper position to perceive our entire conquest in our glorious Head over the utmost power of evil.

But what the devil is always at here is, to draw us to the commission of evil, to do that which dishonours the Holy One within. And this dims the grace of the Spirit; this is why there are so many sorrowful Christians, because there are so many indulging the lusts of the old man, which shut out the glory; seeking the gratification of that which they profess to fight against, and not walking in the Spirit, in the liberty of Christ; but they are grieving that Spirit, and therefore are burdened; they are not walking in the consciousness of hearing "I am the resurrection and the life." But the time is coming, yea, rapidly coming, when the presence of the Saviour shall be always felt, and when, not only by faith but manifestly, the power of evil shall be set aside; when the presence of Jesus shall raise us to unspeakable blessedness; when this corrupt body shall no longer be a clog and hindrance to our spiritual enjoyment, for it shall be entirely conformed to His image, His glorious body. As He has made the souls of His own here to bear His image spiritually, so will He then change the vile body into the image of that body which He now possesses in glory. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Paul speaks of the same to the Philippians, saying, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." Here is what

the saint glories to contemplate, and into the contemplation of which he is led by the graciousness of the Holy Spirit, who, coming into the soul, reveals all this glory; and the more of the glory the Spirit unveils, the more He enables us to triumph over the extent of the power of evil here, and to be opposed in all things to that world which knows nothing of these things.

For what does the world know of the glory of Christ? Nothing: it is led by the spirit of darkness, and sees not the light; he has blinded their eyes; and whoever is really led by the teachings of the Spirit of glory is fully conscious that the world is not. Christ has quickened the souls of His people by His life; and in so far as they recognise this life-giving power are they in a capacity to sympathise with Jesus Himself in all these things. This was what Jesus had not while on earth—there was none to sympathise with Him. In sorrow, His sorrows were all His own: none shared them; they were felt by none. “They all forsook him, and fled.” Even in prospect this was felt, when He exclaims, “Ye shall be scattered every one to his own, and shall leave me alone.”

It was the want of this sympathy with Christ of which Paul complained: “All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” We see it here in the instance of Martha: though a saint, though loved of Jesus, she could not enter into the perfect sympathy of the Lord with His own. “I know,” said she, “that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die: belie vest thou this?” Not, Do you believe that he shall rise again? but, Do you believe what I have said of

myself as the resurrection and the life of every believer? But there was no perception of this in her soul: if there had been, it was truly calculated to have conveyed the greatest comfort to her soul: but no, she saw it not; she just replies, “Yea, Lord, I believe thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world,” and there she left Him. She went her way to get sympathy elsewhere, while He, the life of every comfort, and the soul of sympathy, was left.

And are there not many of the Lord’s people acting thus now? Where do we see that fixedness of satisfaction with the love of Christ which precludes all desire for any other sympathy? And why is it thus, dear friends? Why is it that there is so much of the failing of Martha still to be met with among the saints here? Just for the same reason; they are equally careful and cumbered about many things. She was a saint indeed, and yet so low that she could not enter into the perception of the Lord’s sympathising presence, but went her way and sent her sister Mary in her stead. May the Lord grant that the Spirit may so apply the word to the hearts of His saints here, as to lead them from all false and unsatisfying comforts, more unto sympathy with Jesus!

Dear friends, let me ask you, Are you living on that word of the Lord Jesus—“I am the resurrection and the life”? Are your souls quickened to know that the power of death is put away, wherever the presence of Jesus is recognised? And are you looking out in joyful anticipation to that time when the presence of the Lord shall raise and quicken your mortal bodies? and when bodies and souls shall alike partake of His holy likeness, released from sin, released from the power of death and Satan? when we shall no more offend by yielding to

Satan? when the devil shall have no power to disturb our peace, or the things of the flesh dissipate our joy? when our rest shall be glorious, for we shall rest with our all-glorious Head? when our joy shall be complete, for we shall enter into the full joy of our Lord? Till that time, dear friends, let us live in this blessed expectation, having our lights burning, waiting for the morning light when our Lord shall appear, living witnesses of the truth of God’s promises; for He will surely come, He will not tarry. Amen.

The Parables

Matthew 13:1-50

I have read to you the entire collection of parables brought together in this chapter, because they collectively contain one general view of the plan of God, as developing “the kingdom of heaven”: that it is not an isolated circumstance, but a connected whole, full of comfort to the saints of God. It unfolds the distinguishing features of the “kingdom of heaven.” This term, together with the “kingdom of your Father,” is exclusively used by Matthew, and particularly in this chapter, where are developed the character and circumstances of the kingdom in the dispensation of God.

“Jesus saith unto his disciples, Have ye understood all these things? They say, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed into the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.” Now, we know that a scribe who was taught from the law of Moses was instructed in the mysteries contained therein, which were to be unfolded in process of time, as the Lord quotes: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things that have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”

We find there were seven parables uttered by our Lord here; seven being a complete and perfect number, symbolical of entireness and perfection, wanting nothing, a completeness of intention and performance. Thus seven Spirits of God are taken for a whole; seven churches, seven trumpets, seven plagues, etc. Some of

those parables were uttered for the disciples only, and the others for the multitude, which we shall perceive by just looking at the structure of the chapter.

In the first parable we have a symbol of the world as at present; of all who shall or shall not become partakers of the kingdom of heaven. Here we have the full mind of God upon the subject. The six others represent a likeness of the kingdom of heaven. In the first the man sowing the good seed is just a statement of what our Lord was doing in the world, “the field,” out of which the kingdom of heaven springs up. He was there sowing good seed, while the devil was sowing tares— mingling with them, and mixing with them, but not of them; but of this there is no complete development till the resurrection. This is the testimony of the Spirit of God: at that time the wheat will be gathered into the garner, and the tares afterwards burned.

Now in the other parables we find that which resulted from the sowing of the seed absolutely and definitely. The last three are addressed to the disciples alone, and not to the multitude, as well as the explanation of the first of these six, as it says in verse 36: “Then Jesus sent away the multitude, and went into a house with his disciples”; and, after explaining to them the parable of the tares and the wheat, He says to them, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto,” etc. The other three, spoken to the multitude were, the tares and wheat; the little seed, or grain of mustard seed, descriptive of the increase and growth of this kingdom; and the leaven hid beneath, but working unseen till the whole is completely leavened. The three to His disciples alone were, the treasure hid; the pearl of great price;

and the net cast into the sea. Thus He commences with the sowing, and ends with the gathering in.

The first three exhibit the development of the character and habit this kingdom should assume in the world ostensibly. And of the latter three, two are descriptive of its high value in the sight of God, and the consequences of that love: and the last displays the entire distinction and separation between the children of the world and of the kingdom. The explanation of one parable, given along with this last parable, portrays the manner and mode of this separation—of those who are children of God, or those who are friends to God's enemy, the devil: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."

You will find, on examination, the analogy very strong between the six; between the three to His disciples, and the three to the multitude, to which the explanation of the one is the key; from the first, which is sowing the good seed, to the last, which is drawing the net, of which the others are the medium—the ostensible character; the organisation of the plan; the building up of it; the actual value of the treasure; the beauty and excellency of the pearl of great price; the management and development of that which is the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven. These we will not go through now, only just to shew the structure and order of the whole. Thus the Spirit of God unfolds the way in lively emblems, which are God's most definite testimony to the world, and which are acknowledged as such by all when taught of God's Spirit. Here we have the perfect summing up of the dispensation, which is characterised in Scripture as the "kingdom of heaven."

It is calculated for the joy and comfort of disciples, though spoken to multitudes in parables: they press in the general throng, but they understand not, for they are spoken to in parables. But, says Jesus, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” The world may despise them (it does despise them), it may heap obloquy and contempt on them, for these are not of the world, and the world loves its own. But the saints have the inestimable, the profound, the incalculable blessing of being children of the kingdom—children of God; they have a joy and heavenly delight in retirement with Jesus—of fellowship and communion with Him (of which the world in its natural state knows nothing; of which it is unable to form any conception); conscious of their association with Him, of being in the same position with Him, of being assimilated to Him; this is the constitution of their joy. They are made friends of God; they are in the same situation as Abraham, when the Lord says, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” The Lord condescends to open out His mind—His plans—to them. Abraham was called “the friend of God.” Exactly in the same way does the Lord now spread out the plan of His dispensations to His own, as He says, “Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” Now this is said for the joy and comfort of you who are His disciples. Treasure it up in your hearts, and, oh! feel the blessedness, the wondrous blessedness, of being made the depositaries of the Lord’s mind: “for who hath known the mind of the Lord? But we have the mind of Christ.”

Since this is your position, dear friends, be jealous of squandering your affections, lest you dishonour your trust. If you sin in the cold, heartless world; if you lightly esteem, or seek not continual enjoyment in, your high privileges, the Lord can put no confidence in you, Christ cannot trust you. If you are amusing yourselves with the things around you (no matter what), your minds must be opened to the world, and this leads to the love of it; and this is direct usurpation of Christ's prerogative. Christ's mind is not opened to the world, but is opened to His own. He reveals their portion to them, and He sends the Spirit into their hearts, enabling them to cry, "Abba, Father." He makes known to them that they have the inheritance of sons, shews them their family interest in it, meets them all, as it were, and unfolds the circumstances of His family, and points out to them their individual interest in it; tells them that they are heirs of this inheritance, and have a part and portion with Himself.

If this is our situation (and it is so if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ), should we not be very jealous of admitting anything into our souls that might disturb this harmony, and so disable us from receiving communications with delight— with the filial fondness of children? This is what the world knows nothing about, but is the saint's privilege and lot, and neither Satan nor the world can take it from him. The parable with which this chapter begins introduces this glorious dispensation of which we have been speaking: "A sower went out," etc. (v. 3-9).

The great principle upon which all the blessing of the kingdom of heaven is founded is the sowing of the seed; there is no external development of the position of man

till it is sown. The Lord Jesus Christ goes forth as the sower. The seed, in itself, is a perfectly new and distinct thing; it is not in principle assimilated to anything that was there previously; it finds nothing there that it can call its own; it is not a seed of the soil springing up from it, but it is the seed of God—it comes down from heaven. It is not a principle in the soil which the Lord acts on and improves: when it comes, it finds nothing akin to it there—nothing even like it. It comes from heaven, and leads to heaven; for it is the seed of eternal life. It is a perfectly new principle—extraneously so. When put into the soil, there is then in the soul what was not there before; it is no improvement or modification of that which was previously there. It is eternal life. “Of his own will begat he us.” It is an implanted principle of life which knows no end.

Now, in all naturally there is no seed of eternal life, as life. We may have the seed of eternal endurance, but not of life. But this life is wrought by the implantation of a holy seed, by the power of the word of God, revealing what Christ is to the soul. It is planted by the word of God, watered by the Spirit of God, derives its growth and culture from the same God, and is found bearing fruit to the glory of God until the end, when we come to the “manifestation of the sons of God.”

Now, this, which is God’s truth, breaks down all the natural hopes of aspiring proud man, who thinks there is that within himself which will lead to this, ignorant that the only principle within him is one of death. But let him once experience the implantation of this new seed, he will then think very differently. He will find that he has now a new life; that it is a given life (consequently it could not have been there before); and, moreover, that it

is “eternal life,” and that that life is in Jesus: “he that hath the Son hath life.”

There is one broad principle with which it is most important to be acquainted, namely, that it is nothing from within ourselves that originates this holy principle. And we who are taught of God know this to be the case; for the mind, once alive to God, is fully conscious that it does not live by any power in itself, but from the power of the life of Christ, which they were once conscious of not having, but now have been given. They now see how they stand in the presence of God, not as Adam, for God has stamped death on all that he, or his race, could bring before Him of their own, which is sin; but they know, that though once aliens and wanderers, they have been gathered into the flock, and have been (not made better in their original condition but) translated into another position, even into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, who is now in glory.

There is no communication then from man to God, which can be the real cause or means of receiving heavenly blessings; for man, by nature, has nothing to bring but sin, which cannot draw down a blessing; for God has stamped this judgment dn it—” The wages of sin is death.” Now, notwithstanding this truth, what is the expectation of the natural man? Why, that though God has said this, yet in his case He will not observe it; that God must set aside the honour of His word, the strictness of His holiness, and not give him the wages of sin, which is eternal death; that, in his case, God will dispense with the quickening power which He speaks of as necessary to life, and through and for His Son He will shew him mercy. But it is not so, it cannot, it will not be so: “he,” and he only, “who hath the Son hath life,”

“they,” and they only, “that hear the voice of the Son of God shall live.” The perceptive power comes to him from heaven, and he then has everlasting life; he has what he never had before, but he knows that he has it now. This is God’s truth in the face of a sinful and lifeless world, and testifies the power and agency of the Spirit as manifested in it. They who hear, hear by His power: “the dead shall hear,” therefore the dead must be quickened to hear.

This parable shews us the way in which the seed is scattered. The Lord is here represented by a sower, and is scattering the seed of His word. He that receives it receives life into his soul, which was before “dead in trespasses and sins.” The Lord is scattering the seed now, whether you believe it or not. He is testifying that you are naturally enemies to God, “alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works,” and that the only way of escaping the punishment due is by the reception of this life which He gives, which is in Christ and nowhere else.

The possession of this life is necessary to the entrance into glory. Now where will you seek it, where will you find it, but in Christ? God has told you, that “that life is in his Son.” Have you then this Son of God? Do you know Him as your life? Do you hold sweet communion with Him? Have you a personal fellowship and enjoyment in Him? Do you understand the blessing of identity with Him, so as to comprehend His own words: “Because I live, ye shall live also”? If you do, you are blessed, for God is true, and He has said, “He that hath the Son hath life”: there is a certitude, an everlasting truth, in it. The word sown carries the knowledge of Christ to the soul, and that brings us into relation with God; it opens out

the blessing of life, and shews us that that life is in Christ, and Christ only.

The Lord scatters the seed, but the enemy does his utmost to hinder its progress; he tries to turn it aside, and to prevent its taking root. The Lord scatters and divides the seed, but it springs not up alike: there is a marked distinction made in the parable between the manner in which the seed was received in the first and last places where it was sown, which we have in the explanation of the first. It is said, “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not”; and of the latter it is said, “He that heareth and understandeth.” And so we see the work of the devil in the former: “When any man heareth and understandeth not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” Oh, how subtle is Satan! he well knows that, if once entered in, his power will be resisted; and he endeavours to blind them, because he knows, that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” nor ever shall see it; they cannot perceive it, and therefore he loves to catch away from them the scattered seed, lest they should see, and believe, and be saved: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” can neither perceive it, nor enter into it.

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”; and when once we have it, what is the effect? “He hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” This is the way, the particular process, which the Lord uses, which is brought before us in the word with reference to the sinner’s salvation. It is hard to receive, for we are

very slow to hear and understand, surrounded as we are by a world lying in wickedness; therefore it requires the power of One beyond ourselves to give us the knowledge of it.

We are in a far country; that is, we are not where our heavenly inheritance is—in our Father's house. We live among those who have the guilt of rejecting the Heir of the kingdom. Now, the heirs of the kingdom are there, but the testimony of God's word declares that He is now gathering them out of it, opening their eyes, and revealing Christ. But this is not understood by the world; they are specially distinguished by this, that they do not understand it. The word has been sown, but it has not entered. They know nothing at all about the kingdom of God: they hear the word; but it all passes away as though they heard nothing, for they do not understand it. And while so, while in this position of incapacity of comprehension, they have nothing to do with it: it conveys no ideas of happiness to them—it is associated with no portion of enjoyment to them. They are satisfied with the world: that they have, that is their portion, they are looking for no other. Their position is just that they know nothing in the world about the kingdom which is set up in Christ, in which, if any one be, he is blessed. But these receive it not; for, though the word of the kingdom has been sown and scattered, the devil has come and caught it away from them. This then is one very important distinction, that you would do well now to consider, that though the word is at this present moment being scattered to all, there is a wonderful difference in its effects. If you just hear and do not understand it, you may be sure there is one busy among you—busy in your hearts to snatch out the very

remembrance of the thing, lest it should enter in. It fell only on the outside, for Satan keeps it out, and they are well pleased to let him; and this is God's truth about the matter.

Brethren, the world is a lost world, and Satan reigns; there is only one way of escape—by being taken out of the position in which the world is placed and planted in Christ's kingdom. There is no life but in Christ. Have you then entered into Christ's kingdom, or has the devil yet the key of your hearts? At that tremendous day, when the secrets of all hearts will be known, then will the distinguishing fruits be manifested, and many of the "wayside" hearers will then, for the first time, find they have been mistaken, when asked what they have been about here, and brought in condemned by the Judge Himself. Then will He recognise none but those who are united to Him, one with Himself in life, now for ever to be one with Him in glory.

These, and these alone, are His own—His crown of rejoicing —the travail of His righteous soul; and they know Him; they recognise Him, so as to be able to say, This is the Lord we have been longing and looking for. They know His countenance; they are, from close familiarity, well acquainted with His lineaments; they have had such communion, such fellowship, with Him, that they cannot be mistaken. Oh, the contrast between the sorrow (then unavailing sorrow) and misery of those who knew Him not, who have been ignorant of Him who comes to them now as a stranger and a Judge!

The next verse shews that some fell among stony places; and the explanation tells us, that they heard the word, and anon with joy received it, but had no root in

themselves but endure for a while; and, when persecution arises because of it, are offended. These have heard the gospel extensively preached, are mixed up with the people of God, and appear to understand and enter into their joy. They commence a regular course, as if on the way heavenwards. They hear of God, of God's love to sinners, of God's wonderful love in giving His only Son to die for sinners. They hear of One "who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." They hear of One, "who, though in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." They hear of One, calculated, when thus spoken of, to win the natural affections, just as the exhibition of these beauties in any other being would do; and their natural feelings are awakened, but nothing more. "They have a name to live," and yet are practically dead; they have heard "a very lovely song," and are pleased; they have heard of Christ's demeaning Himself to the capacity of a slave, that He might exalt them to heaven; suiting Himself to their situation and wants; doing wonders in all the world; and the mere external apprehension of these things made a way to win the natural affections. They could not deny them as matters of fact—of historic faith; they were drawn, as it were, by the "bands of a man," but that was all; their feelings were excited, but they have never mourned for sin; there was no consciousness of their particular individual share in the sufferings of Christ; there was no internal perception of love, leading the soul to seek the object of it; there was no feeling of life, making them know that they were living on Christ for all things, making them feel that the sins that were on them had been placed to His account, bringing Him "into the dust of death."

This humbling work they know not; when Satan's dominion is broken down in the soul, and Christ admitted as a Sovereign and a Saviour; when He becomes all to the soul, and the soul rejoices in that portion. And the day of trial, of affliction, of tribulation, or of persecution manifests this, and the day of the Lord's fierce wrath terminates it; this apparent joy comes to nothing, for they knew not Christ; the seed was only on the surface—the root of the matter was not in them: theirs was only the manifested outward joy of natural feelings awakened; they had not the joy of the inner man of the heart; the surface of their affections was pliable and soft, but their heart was still hard as a stone—it was a stony heart—the stone had never been removed; therefore there was no warmth, no love, no life, no Christ within; they had Christ without, but the stone within. No Spirit's teaching, no work in the conscience; they had nothing to look to for comfort or assurance, when the great question, the great controversy which is between God and man, came to be decided; not being associated with Christ, they just came to nothing. They had no root, and they all fell away.

Now the next class have less of this character which is described in these last. The seed fell, but it was received into a ground previously occupied and overrun with thorns. They appeared well; had received the seed, as far as human observation could go; and there were indeed roots in these, but they were the roots of something else— "some fell among thorns"; they were growing there before the scattering of the seed. The thorns had pre-occupied the ground; they occupied all the ground, and were nourished from it. Doubtless,

when the word was first received on the soil, these thorns might have appeared feeble, and of very little importance, perhaps supposed to be plucked up; but they left the roots there, which sprung up, to the rejection of the good seed—choked it—and so no fruit came forth. These are they who profess to hear, understand, and receive the word of the kingdom; who seem to set a value upon the great gospel plan of salvation; who go on for a while prosperously, but the latent enemy has been and is working underneath and soon shews himself. He flings into the balance the trials, cares, pleasures, profits, lusts, and deceitful tricks of this world, and the progress of the seed is choked up and becomes unfruitful. They are occupied with the things of this world—its sorrows, its sadness, or its delights; they are buried in them; the things in which they engage are those which choke the seed—things associated, not with Christ, but with that which He will judge.

It would be the saints' delight to have the weeds plucked up by the roots; they know the value of the true seed, and therefore are jealous of admitting or having anything in the soil which may render it unfruitful. They well know that if the thorns are there, their natural tendency is to choke the seed; and therefore they desire their entire departure.

Is this your estimation of the worth and value of the true seed? God takes care of His own seed; He husbands it, He waters it, He is very jealous over it; and when He sees a thorn spring up, even in the good ground, He says in affectionate remonstrance, "Thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing only is

needful”: and leads them then to say and feel, “We are debtors, not to the flesh to live after the flesh.”

If any thing keeps the seed from springing up, having occupied the place where it should be, that is not of God, He says, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! “The gathering them, living for them, and enjoying of them choke the seed, shut up the mind from the things of God, and make it rest in what is an abhorrence in God’s sight. “One thing is needful”; and we see how the Lord vindicated Mary’s choice: “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” And in that day, when all worldly wealth, riches, and honours can no longer be esteemed, even by the possessors of them, then the till then unseen (unseen except by faith) realities of the true riches hid in Christ will be wonderfully exhibited, when they who have chosen Him for their portion shall have their portion, and all others will be destroyed.

There is one class more to which we must direct our attention, and they are distinguished here, as “he that heareth the word and understandeth it.” And here one delights to rest on the blessedness of the hope of glory implanted in the soul of the true believer; his heart is opened—the seed descends, and abides, springing up and bearing fruit. They understand that they are in a world which wearied Christ, and they too are wearied of it; they seek a separation from it; they understand that Jesus was “holy, harmless, and undented”; and God the Spirit, dwelling in them, leads them to follow in His footsteps. They understand from the word of grace that the Lord Jesus has set up this spiritual kingdom in the midst of a world which has rejected Him, and in this His grace settles them—no rest in any other portion; their

controversy with God, and their question with hell, has been settled by Jesus. They understand that the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ their Lord, has sealed with His own blood their forgiveness, and this takes the spring of their hearts, and sends their affections out again to centre on Jesus.

These are the things which the saints understand; and the devil cannot dispossess them of them. Were they only on the surface, he might catch away the word, or cause them to be offended, or choke its fruitfulness; but, being planted within by the Spirit of the living God, and taking root, Satan in vain assaults, for there the Lord reigns, who has proved Himself stronger than Satan. Satan may torment, but cannot overcome; for, though choking cares may intrude, and noxious weeds will shew their heads, the possessors of this heavenly seed are willing—are longing—to have them all plucked up and burned, with all the briars and thorns of nature. They "have tasted that the Lord is gracious"; they understand His word, and they love it amidst distresses, trials, and sorrows; they know that Jesus came to unbind the heavy burdens, and soon He will come again to set His own free from every fetter. In the contemplation of this the believer will rest His soul on Jesus, viewing Him as gathering in His own elect, when His oppressed, persecuted, but very dear children shall see and inherit the kingdom of their Father.

They have then passed through the cross, they have left everything behind at the "door," which is Christ. Guilt cannot pass through Him; sin can no longer shew itself; being purged, it has no longer any hold of the believer: he is standing in the favour and smiles of God, being included in the body to which Christ belongs. He has

entered by Christ, and is therefore recognised as His. And this blessedness he has in anticipation and perspective here—the reality is there for him; that he knows, for he has the dawn of it within himself, the seed of a divine nature. He is waiting for the coming of the "Morning Star," when the seed He blesses will be known. And in this the believer rejoices, being conscious of having life, of being quickened, of being in the second Adam. He is also conscious he has not the glory at present; but he knows he has "eternal life," the fruits of which he is called upon to exhibit while here, as described in the Epistle of James; which he desires and seeks for, and to which it is his delight in his measure to attain. This is the character, the hope, the attainment of the believer; of one who has received the good seed, understands the word of the kingdom, and brings forth fruit according to his measure.

In closing this testimony, let us remember, that "he that hath the Son hath life"; he actually possesses it at present— that is the fact. The word of God says not shall have, but "hath eternal life"; and God the Spirit testifies of this to our souls. He testifies of the electing love of God, of the redeeming grace of Jesus, and enables us to recognise ourselves as "accepted in the Beloved," having received and believed the word of the kingdom, and this in the face of a world lying in wickedness, on which judgments are now about to be executed.

The times portend great things: the dark and heavy clouds are gathering in the air, and hanging over a guilty world, which shall soon be discharged in tremendous judgments; the day of God's long-suffering will soon be over: now, "now is the accepted time." If ye have resisted the voice of truth, the voice of the Holy Ghost

till now, resist it no longer. Judgments are coming, more terrible than on them to whom it was said, “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.” I say not, ye do— but do ye yet resist His power? I say not, it is the case—but is it the case? Is it not very possible that some, even among you, are still rejecting the counsel of God against yourselves? If you say you are not, let me ask, Have you received and understood the word of the kingdom? With what are you seeking to please God? Honour? God does not want honour. Or wisdom? God does not want your wisdom, nor learning, nor outward profession, nor knowledge. These you may have, and be admired for the possession of; and you may have nothing that assimilates you to God. If you know not the hidden life, you know nothing: the princes and wise men of this world knew not, and so they crucified the Lord of glory.

Have you been doing this? If so, even now turn to the Lord Jesus. Look at the testimony of Him in every passage of His word, and you will see that it is one whole testimony of love. It shews the work of the Lord Jesus undertaken and accomplished for sinners, the Spirit’s witness of Him, the Father’s love in sending Him. Till this is understood, the testimony of God’s witnesses is spent in vain, as far as regards those who receive it not, and threatened vengeance awaits them.

May the Lord introduce and nourish this seed in your souls, give you the tastes, desires, and aims of His people, and fill you with unspeakable, everlasting blessing hereafter. Amen.

The Sufferings Of Christ

Psalm 22:22

The whole of this Psalm evidently contains the words and experience of the Lord Jesus Christ. It begins with one of His most momentous sentences, as if a direct quotation from prophecy: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and gives the very words of the infidel Jews, when the Saviour was expiring on the tree, in the eighth verse: “He trusted in the Lord, that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”

The whole Psalm is an accurate scene of our Lord’s sufferings. In the verse preceding the text, His agony of soul is described: “Save me from the lion’s mouth! “the intenseness of which agony is thus described in Hebrews 5:7: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears”; and of which we have witnessed the facts in the garden of Gethsemane, where His soul was “sore amazed,” and He prayed, if it were possible, to have this cup pass from Him. And in the concluding part of verse 21 (“Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns”), we have Him brought to the crisis of extreme suffering, on the very horns of the altar, as describing the sacrifice bound and laid on. We have His delivery thence, “Thou hast heard mc,” as in Psalm 40: “I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry: he brought me up also from out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and ordered my goings.” The very next verse describes Him thus: “I will declare thy name unto my

brethren: in the midst of the congregation [or church] will I praise thee."

Here we read our Lord's testimony after He had been heard, after He had come out of the horrible pit, after the agony, and suffering, and woe, and death had been past; in short, at His resurrection. It is just at that time this verse describes Him: and in it we see, first, the office He has taken in declaring God's name to His brethren; and, secondly, we see Him as He stands in the midst of His church, as its Head.

And who is it that thus testifies, "I will declare"? Who it is we cannot mistake, from the entire tenor and express words of the Psalm. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. And what does He declare? "Thy name": "I will declare thy name unto my brethren"; the name of Him to whom He appeals as His God. And that, brethren, is the only way we know anything of God; when the Lord Jesus Christ Himself reveals Him and declares Him. It is God's appointed way of communicating anything of Himself; and without a knowledge of God through Christ we never can know peace. In declaring God's name, Christ declares His own: He testifies what He has done for man, and the consequences of it. Immediately after the work is finished, He communicates it to His brethren: "Save me from the lion's mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." And immediately after His delivery, He exclaims, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren."

The Psalm, throughout, gives us the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, and also His strength, and comfort, and trust in God in the midst of them, which prophecies meet their fulfilment so accurately and fully in His life: "I

knew that thou hearest me always"; "I am not alone, for the Father is with me." But there was one hour, one period of darkness, and of agony, when Satan was let loose to buffet Him, but not yet able to turn Him aside—to take Him off from His high trust in God, when He was brought so low as to say, "The waters have come in even unto my soul": "My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." The very height of His trouble was the hiding of God's countenance.

There were three things which the Lord Jesus had to encounter, and to triumph over, and which were ever before Him—death, guilt, and the power of Satan. The union of these against Him was the "power of darkness," which He acknowledges to the multitudes who came to apprehend Him— "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." Now these were the three great enemies which were against us. We had sinned, and God had declared, "The wages of sin is death." We were guilty; and condemnation could not be put away but by the removal of the occasion of it; and Satan was manifestly against us, as an adversary to our final freedom. Now the Lord Jesus Christ had just to meet all these, and if they were overcome in Him, as the federal Head and representative of His people, then there was liberty—glorious and everlasting liberty.

We find then that Christ had really these three to contend with. He came to be the sin-bearer; and, bearing sin, He must necessarily subject Himself to its wages, which was death. Thus bearing sin, guilt was necessarily imputed to Him, and He must suffer its condemnation until God was satisfied. And finally He must, as the Head of His people, overcome him under

whom Adam, and all mankind in him, had failed. This Christ did; these He met, took, sustained, remained stedfast under, and overcame; conquered them all, obtained the victory—with wounds and bloodshed indeed; but having triumphed, He rose with the full blessedness of the enjoyment of God's countenance, death having passed, and guilt removed, and Satan overcome by Him, in the name and for the eternal blessedness of His people.

This was fully manifested at His resurrection, which was a seal of His perfect accomplishment and acceptance; when He rose (a living witness to the full satisfaction for sin having been asked and obtained, and God's faithfulness being manifested), "Thou hast heard me," said Christ, "from the horns of the unicorns." And then, without any delay, He immediately adds, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren": as if the enjoyment He possessed was incomplete until the knowledge of it was communicated to them whom He had made part of Himself.

Christ Himself bore witness, and still bears witness by the Spirit, to the souls of believers, that redemption work is completed, and by this they are participators in all His blessedness. He comes to them with the blessed information of death being triumphed over, guilt being put away for ever, and Satan overcome. That is the comfort, the joy, the peace He brings to the soul, which the knowledge of these facts leads to. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren"; as if He had said, I will come and make known to your souls, my brethren, the victory I have obtained over all your enemies, and the consequences resulting from it, as standing perfectly justified. And in this full position of acquittal all His

people stand, when Christ was declared “to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” And having ascended, think you that He has less power now? No. Having risen over sin, death, the grave, and Satan, He gives the Spirit now as a witness to the soul, to prove the subjugation of all its enemies—death triumphed over, guilt removed, and Satan overcome.

And thus He brings believers to the adoption of children, to the endearing character of family relationship, not as servants, but sons. He shews them that He has redeemed them that were under the curse of a violated law, that they might receive the adoption of sons; and then He brings them into the communion of the Father’s love— “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

This is what He does—that is what He declares in the hearts of believers by the indwelling of the Spirit; and this union between Himself and His people—this blessed relationship subsisting between them and the Father, He blessedly proclaimed, immediately after His resurrection, when He declared, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God.”

He was just about to ascend to His Father, to ascend to that glory which He had with His Father; but what does He do previously?—there standing as the representative of His people, He identifies Himself thus with them: “My Father, and your Father; my God, and your God!” O brethren, the consciousness of this is great blessedness to a soul having gone through the conviction that it is lost, ruined; finding it just and right for God to cast it off

because of its transgressions. O the happiness, when Christ comes by the Spirit, in the power of His resurrection, and demonstrates this to the poor soul, who knows it has sinned, and has been justly cast out of the presence of God, because, like Adam, it practically refused and rejected God. Then can the believer understand the full peace Christ brings, when He testifies what He has done for the soul, and the position into which He has already brought His people: “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”

If the Lord were pleased personally to appear, and to say to your souls: I am come to tell you what I have done for you; I have conquered all your enemies, and brought you into so wondrous a state of privilege, that you are the sons of God—joint-heirs with Me in My Father’s house—all sin is done away for ever, and there is no more condemnation for you—what a witness would this be to your soul! But, brethren, this witness you have had, when Christ rose after the battle had been fought—rose triumphant, and just on the eve of His ascension to glory, testifies to His people, “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father.” Christ gives the believer faith just to see Him standing in that position, and to believe it, as though he saw Him with his bodily eyes, recognising Christ as his representative entering into heavenly places for him, and now in that glory which shall be his. Thus is the believer’s peace firmly established, as the Saviour says, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”

And was this peace to cease when He went from the earth? No; He expressly says, “I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you.” This He will do

manifestly—but now by the Spirit of holiness, who comes to the soul in a new power; declaring the same truth which Jesus had before revealed; still bringing home this testimony to the soul, “My Father, and your Father.” And He just brings in the same blessed truth—“Ye are sons.” It is not less true—it is not less real—not less certain, because Christ is actually gone to the Father. No, that proves its reality, for He is thence declared to be the Son of God with power, by His resurrection; and this He declares to His brethren, and in a way the most engagingly convincing.

He says it, when these things had been done; after death had been triumphed over, sin blotted out, guilt removed for ever, and Satan foiled! And now, He comes with this message, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” There is no more sacrifice for sin—He Himself having suffered all the penalty due for all the sins of His people, gone through the punishment of it—God’s wrath, and received the wages for it—death: so He is entitled well to credence, as He brings the truth to us in a way of suffering and in a way of love unparalleled.

Now there are two ways in which sin would hinder our peace with God: either in not seeing the sufficiency of Christ’s blood to wipe it out of the book of God’s remembrance, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; or not having a consciousness that the guilt of it is removed from ourselves; which feeling of guilt the devil endeavours to tie on our conscience, and thus to keep us from peace. But when the Comforter, the Spirit of holiness, enters into our hearts, “to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” in the face of Jesus Christ, then we see that Christ having ascended, having

entered into heaven, His work for sinners has been accomplished, and as the representative of all believers He is now before the throne, appearing there in the presence of God for us: and as He is without spot, having fulfilled all righteousness, so in Him we are spotless and righteous.

Here we see the perfectness of His love; having removed their sin and guilt, He makes Himself one with them—He calls them His own brethren: “I will declare thy name unto my brethren.” “He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Oh, this is a blessed identity into which the child of God is brought! Have you any consciousness of this in your souls? If you have, you are blessed. How wondrous is that manifestation of His anxiety and willingness to make known immediately to His brethren His deliverance, and the consequences of it to them! His first declaration, on being rescued from the horns of the altar, is to make His brethren partakers of its blessed effects; He declares it to those He loves; as though He would say, It is all done now, and I must go and tell them. It is done that they may participate in My blessedness, being about to enter into the presence of God with great joy for them, and as their representative. Thus, being delivered Himself, He delivers from sin, guilt, death, and Satan, all those who are part of Himself —who “are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” —by declaring His finished work, making known the Father’s love, and bringing them to the sweet consciousness that God is their Father.

Jesus has declared Himself to be the Apostle and High Priest of their profession, ever living to make intercession. Having entered within the vail, He is there pleading the efficacy of that blood which He has shed;

and He sends down this testimony of love by the Holy Spirit, who, being a witness to His work, stamps the truth of it in the soul, where He takes up His dwelling, and thus unites the believer in sweet association and fellowship with Christ, in all He has done, and suffered, and in the high station to which He is now exalted: and they are Christ's brethren, who are brought to see Him thus their Head and representative—to know Him and the power of His resurrection, as rising for them without sin unto salvation. This the world knows nothing about. Christ's fellowship was not with the world, but with His own, whom He had chosen out of the world: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world." He is a Christian to whom Christ has declared the Father's name, as reconciled to Him by the peace-speaking blood; that He has carried into effect His glorious purpose of redemption—this He declares in the midst of the Church, of those whom He has gathered out of the world, and translated into the kingdom of heaven. There He stands in the midst of them, as their glorious and triumphant Head—they are His. "They are not of the world," He said Himself, "even as I am not of the world." They are no longer in connection with the world; they have done with it, as a rule of life or conduct; its fashions, pursuits, customs, and desires, no longer guide them; instead of being led by them, they are led by the Spirit, and choose those things which the Spirit delights in.

As Christ offers up the prayers of His church, so He is said to be the Head of their praises. The believer sees Christ brought into the "dust of death"; but he also hears Him, after His conquest, in the midst of His church, declaring the Father's perfect satisfaction and

pleasure. Christ's joy in the church's salvation, and in the inward witness of the Spirit of love to the work of Christ, we have the blessed certainty of the Father's love. All is thus finished. Now, did the Lord begin to praise before the work was finished? No; it is upon His resurrection He shews forth praises; then He begins the "new song," which His redeemed are taught to sing: "And they sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." It is a new song, because a redeemed song, and they have done with sin, that is, as to any condemnation; they may, indeed, before they join the church triumphant, while they are here below, be tempted still, harassed, and oppressed; but greater is He that is for them than he that is against them.

Here we see what the Lord's work is, and the blessed effects of it. Nothing could so completely satisfy a soul of this, as the declaration of our Lord, after He had effected redemption: "I ascend to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God," leading the way to the Father, and then bringing them by that way that He went Himself; bringing them as His associates—His brethren—as His own, engaged with them in the same work of praising God. Now, that is what the world cannot do. The world never praises God; it knows not how; it knows Him not, and never can know Him by its own wisdom: "The world by wisdom knew not God"; but Christ's brethren know Him, and praise Him, when He comes and declares God's name to them; and it is the very declaration of the Father that calls forth their praises: they cannot but praise when they hear Christ saying, "I have declared unto them thy name and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me

may be in them, and I in them." Now, dear friends, have you received this declaration of the Father's love by Christ? If you have, are you now praising Him? Have you entered into the vastness of that guilt to which you have individually contributed, which could call for such wonder-working effects as the descent of the Son of God into this world of woe? And have you seen it put away? Have you measured sin—your sin—by the sufferings and death of Jesus? And have you set your seal to the truth of God's word, as seen in Christ, that "the wages of sin is death"? What was all the work about? Is it true, or was it all a mere story or tale? What was all this suffering for?

Christ has declared His Father's name unto you. If you know why it was, you know that you are living in a world guilty of the sin of rejecting Christ, and that He thus permitted Himself to be rejected, that in Him you might be accepted; that He might pay the ransom price for your souls, and set you free. This He tells you, and declares that what He does, He does surely. Do you want security for it? You have the word of God, and the oath of God for it, "that by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to he, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." Has God made such a declaration to you? O, wondrous intelligence! Then is He of inestimable value to your souls. As sinners you were lost; but, as sinners, He has declared that there is hope—that there is joy—that there is salvation, and that He brings it to you. He does not wait for you to come for it, for then you would never receive it, but He brings it to you—He makes known the Father's love—that "it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"; that God the

Father is pleased, satisfied, glorified; and He brings you to the same acknowledgment of satisfaction in Jesus, who lived for you, who died for you, who rose for you, and “who ever liveth to make intercession for you.” O, what a claim has He on you to live for Him! Can it be possible that you still love the world? that you are still fond of the world which hated Christ, and drove Him out of it? The world is the enemy of God. Will you then be its friend? Oh, may the Lord draw off your affections, that are now drawn out and placed on the things of the world, and fix them on Himself, on Him who changeth not, but is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever!”

Parable Of The Sower

Matthew 13

We have here three reasons why the seed of God's testimony concerning Christ is unproductive, described in the character and circumstances; first, of those who hear by the wayside, the hard rock, and the beaten path in which Satan ever watches to catch away that which is sown in the heart. In this he is compared to the fowls of the air, which immediately devour the scattered seed that remains on the surface of the earth.

Dear friends, what do we learn from this? That there is nothing in the natural heart of man to afford root for divine truth. No, everything within us is entirely dissimilar to God, and therefore to everything that is like Him; and hence we must naturally hate and reject that testimony concerning Himself, which He has given in His word. The Word signifies Christ, through whom alone God is seen and known by sinful man. I say, dear friends, there is nothing whatever in the natural heart of man to receive God's revelation of Christ as a Saviour; therefore he ever must and will reject it, till God Himself imparts that vivifying power through which alone Christ is seen and valued. Everything in our hearts (I now speak of what we are naturally) is unlike God, as much unlike Him as sin is to holiness; and therefore we cannot admit Christ into our hearts any more than the Jews could abide Him in the world.

Dear friends, I say, By nature we are nothing but sin. Man might consider us amiable, but everything that is not exactly like God He rejects and abhors; and, dear friends, when He looks into our hearts, what does He

see there? Everything, I say, that is the very opposite to Himself. Can a revelation from Him, can anything of which He approves, be received for a while in this state? No, everything within us must dislike it, and therefore I say, until God Himself imparts power to receive Christ, our hearts will still remain the hard beaten path trodden by the devil, who will always destroy the seed which is there sown (as described in verse 19 of this chapter), "when any one heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." From this, dear friends, we learn that God alone can give the seed of the word root within us, which, as the power of God, Satan cannot destroy. Observe, it is true and real seed that perishes after it was sown, not a false testimony, not something like it, which yet differs from it. It is truth, God's testimony concerning Christ, that is received in the natural heart and mind; but unless God Himself give it root there, it lies like seed scattered on the surface of the earth, and is immediately caught away by Satan.

A second reason for the destruction of this seed is given us in the description of those who received it as on "stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root they withered away." Nothing whatever to afford root for it in the natural heart. Here the seed is not immediately destroyed by Satan, it dureth for a while. Natural feelings and dispositions give it influence: but observe, dear friends, it is nature still— that which is unlike God—what is entirely opposed to Him; and therefore the seed sown in

such a heart cannot take root, and must wither away. Seed on stony ground might have some earth, grow, and produce a flower as beautiful as any that has root. But let a scorching sun or unfavourable weather affect it, and it will soon wither. Thus, dear friends, can the natural man receive the word by the exercise of his intellect, and have his natural affections so influenced by it as for a while to resemble those in whom the seed has a divine root.

I say, dear friends, the intellect and affections of the natural man, according to his particular disposition, whether more influenced by his understanding or feelings, may, for a while, be so moved by divine truth as to cause him to resemble those who receive the seed into good ground—no apparent difference between them. I speak of what they are in our sight. They rejoice in Christ; they profess to love Him, and are outwardly separated from the world; they present fruits so like those of God's planting, that I say to human observation there appears no difference between them, but they have no root, and soon wither away. The seed forthwith sprung up: why? Because it had no deepness of earth, no solemn views, no serious sense of their past alienation from God and present distance from fellowship with Him. God can, and in some does, enable His people to rejoice in Christ with exceeding great joy, when they first see and receive Him. But these instances are few, and usually not followed by such good fruit as is seen in those who receive the word with strong affections of heart and mind at a sense of their past transgressions, the dissimilarity of their past lives to everything that was like God, and therefore to everything that He liked,

and at their present distance from that fellowship with God, to which they are admitted through Christ.

Those who receive the seed, as in stony places, know nothing of this; they have no apprehension of the glory of Christ; no fellowship with Him through the Spirit; no communion with God: the seed has no root whatever within them, and therefore, though it dureth for a while, it must and will wither away. Why? It is declared in verse 21 of this chapter, “When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended.” All is well with such as receive the word with joy, but have no root, while they live at ease in the world. They produce fruit as fair and promising as any that is seen in the church; but when they are exposed to worldly loss and persecution for their profession of Christ, when trials and afflictions and the cross meet them in their path, they are offended. These are the scorching sun which withers the seed and all its fruits. It has no root which could assimilate the heart and mind to the mind and will of God, and hence they must prefer all that nature loves and God hates, to a knowledge of Him through Christ, and all the glories of His kingdom. This seed was soon received, had no root, and when tribulation and persecution arose, soon perished. This, I say, dear friends, ever must and will be the case where the seed is not planted and rooted by divine power—a power entirely opposed to everything which is naturally within us. Unless God Himself give us deepness of earth, by leading us into a knowledge of what we are, and what He is, and an apprehension of the glory of Christ, the seed sown in our hearts will wither away; there are things which are too deep for the sun of the world to reach and affect; without them we cannot endure. In

obeying Christ, He may require us to act as though we hated father, and mother, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and our own life also; and unless prepared for the sacrifice, He declares we cannot be His disciples. How can he be prepared for this, who loves nothing but sin and the present world? and therefore, dear friends, I again say, that unless God Himself plant and root the word of His truth within us by a power that assimilates us to Himself, we cannot endure or forsake all that He requires of us as followers of Christ, and as His children called to communion and fellowship with Himself.

We proceed to the third cause, why the seed is unfruitful. “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them.” What are these thorns? They are particularly described in Mark 4:19: “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.” Observe, dear friends, the lusts of other things, not only the cares of this world, but the lusts of other things, are equally effectual in destroying it. What are these other things? “Other” is here contrasted with everything of which the word testifies: it signifies everything but the word, all that is not the word— to be plainer, all that is not Christ. Yes, dear friends, the word, when described as choked, signifies the testimony concerning Christ; but Christ Himself is the word presented to us in this testimony. To reveal Christ, to bring us into fellowship with Him, to form Him within us, is God’s purpose when He plants in us the seed of divine truth; and therefore, dear friends, I again say, the lusts of other things signify anything and everything but Christ. No matter what it is, if the natural

heart loves it, desires it, finds pleasure in it, it is a lust that chokes the seed.

“All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are not of the Father.” To human sight it may assume a very pleasing appearance, what is called amiable, or it may assume the form of lawful duties; but if these proceed from nature, if nature feels ease and satisfaction in them, they are not Christ, they are opposed to Him, and as certainly choke the seed and prevent any fruit from it, as the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, or the most evil dispositions which we condemn. Everything that is not the fruit of the Spirit is flesh. The Spirit reveals Christ, and forms Him in the heart, and therefore everything but Christ is among the lusts of the flesh. All but Christ are the lusts described in Galatians 5, in which it is said, “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.” Christ and nature are entirely contrary to each other, for nature is the flesh and its lusts, and it is declared in Romans 8, “If ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” I again say, that what the natural man calls his lawful duties are among his lusts which choke the seed of the word; they proceed from nature, they serve and please it, a nature which is unlike God and Christ, and therefore what they must hate.

The Christian has lawful duties to perform, duties to parents and children, and other relations, and the Spirit of God will teach him to discover and fulfil them. These duties may then be called Christ, for they proceed from Christ living in him, are done in obedience to Him, and

are the effects of His wisdom and power. I again say, everything but Christ is the thorns that choke the seed and render it unfruitful. It may assume the appearance of what is called amiable, or it might appear unamiable, it is seen in both forms, but I again say; everything within us and done by us which is not Christ, are the lusts of other things described in Mark 4; and are the thorns which choke the seed and prevent its fruitfulness, as much as any outward wickedness that is generally condemned. Here, dear friends, are the three reasons why the seed of the word is unfruitful: Satan's power; the natural enmity of our heart to God, to all that He loves and is like Him; and the influence of things seen and temporal—usually and justly described as the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

We shall now notice the seed falling into good ground, in which it brings forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirtyfold. If all that is in the natural heart hates and rejects the word, why is it thus fruitful? Our Lord Himself informs us, as declared in the beginning of John 15, "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman." Here, dear friends, is the reason why the seed has a root in any heart and produces fruit. Such is God's value and love for all the branches of the true vine, that He Himself condescends to be their husbandman, first, to impart to them that power by which the seed has root and grows, and when it becomes a branch in Christ to purge it that it may bring forth more fruit. This power, as proceeding from Himself, is like God, and loves everything that He approves; hence it is the very opposite of all that is in the natural heart—it brings into fellowship with Christ. Christ lives in and through those who experience this

power, for, as we read in 1 Corinthians 6, “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit”; and according to their fellowship with Christ, and their separation from everything that is not Him, they bring forth fruit, thirty, sixty, or an hundredfold.

That the vivifying power of the Father is engaged, when the seed takes root in the heart, is declared in two passages of Scripture, to which I shall direct your attention: James i:18, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures”; and also in 1 Peter 1:23: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” Here, you perceive that it is the creating vivifying power of God that provides a root in the heart of man through which the seed abides there. “Begotten,” “born again”; a new birth by almighty power is needful, and effected in every heart where the seed has root. The resurrection life that is in Christ is imparted to all for whom He died. With Him they live again, arise, ascend, and sit in heavenly places; they are rooted and built up in Him; He dwelleth in their hearts; because He lives, they shall live also. The seed must remain in them, but He Himself declared, “Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.”

I again direct your attention to His words in John 15. “Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit.” Dear brethren, though we have fellowship with Christ, and sit with Him in heavenly places, our earthly nature is still in a defiling world. The world and Satan act on this nature; these and its own sin (for it is still enmity to God and all that He loves) are continually drawing the believer to

dispositions and objects that defile the conscience, hide from him the glory of Christ, and hinder the blessedness of fellowship with Him and communion with the Father. How is their influence prevented? The Father purges every branch in the true vine. While the flesh lusts against the Spirit, the Spirit acts against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other. The Spirit Himself directs the believer to everything opposed to the flesh, it fills him with communion and earnest desires to enjoy his fellowship with Christ and the Father: Satan, the world, and nature work against this. How is the flesh subdued that God's children may enjoy their precious liberty? Precisely in this way: the Father purgeth them that they may bring forth more fruit. He sends afflictions and trials, to increase their separation from the present world, and to weaken the sin that works in their members; then that word within them, which is Christ, has dominion, and by Him they bring forth more fruit. Thus does the Father purge every branch in the vine. He ploughs up their hearts to remove from them everything that prevents their fruitfulness; He suits the affliction to the particular need for it, that it might root out of their hearts the lust of other things which tends to choke the seed. The other things, as I have said, are all and everything which is not Christ. Everything but Christ prevents our fruitfulness, the least contact with the world (for who can touch pitch and not be denied?) everything nature desires and loves. These causes destroy not the seed where God has given it root, for it is the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever; but, dear friends, they are the reason why we bring forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty fold, instead of that hundredfold which affords such blessedness.

I say again, the Father purgeth every branch in the true vine, that it may bring forth more fruit. Dear friends, let us notice His love and condescension in this; just think what we are, and what He is; we, such guilty, weak, miserable sinners, and He so exalted and glorious, and yet He condescends to serve us! Yes, to serve us, for surely He does this wfyen He undertakes and fulfils a service so important as purging us that we may bring forth more fruit. Such, I say, is His love for the vine and its branches, that He is their husbandman! Such are His purposes concerning all whom He gave to Christ, and are one in Him, that He is continually purging them from the influence of nature, and the world, and the power of Satan, who works through both; and again I notice His wonderful love and condescension in rendering them this service.

Dear friends, how are you affected by knowing that the Father will purge you, that you may bring forth more fruit?— purge you from everything that nature loves?— from all that assimilates you to the world? Can you say that you desire this by whatever means He is pleased to use? Since Christ Himself was not of this world, when He chose entire dissimilarity to it, God cannot suffer His people to be assimilated to it; no, He will purge them to draw them altogether from it, and then will they bring forth more fruit. But, I say, how are your minds affected by this? Can you say that you desire to be thus purged; that you love to have your hearts ploughed up, that God might remove from them everything that prevents you bringing forth fruit an hundredfold, everything that is not Christ and fellowship with Him? Are you pleased with every trial and affliction, however painful to nature, that subdues nature, draws you from the world,

assimilates you to God and to Christ, and raises you to the glory and blessedness of fellowship with them? I inquire not, does nature love it? This cannot be, because the trial is sent to mortify and subdue nature, and, therefore, must be painful. It is, and must be, as described in Hebrews 12: “Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby.” And observe the apostle’s reasoning in the preceding verses, “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 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.”

Dear friends, does this reasoning reconcile you to everything by which the Father purges you, that you might bring forth more fruit? I say, I am not inquiring, does nature love it? but I ask, does faith approve of it? does faith desire it? does the Spirit, who is opposed to all that opposes Christ, lead you to present your hearts unto God, that He might plough them up and purge them, ready and thankful for anything and everything by which He will prepare you to bring forth fruit an hundredfold? The Father is the husbandman who waits on you, that He might thus serve you. He ploughs, He waters, He purges every branch in Christ. Let us, I again say, admire and adore His love and condescension in this, and yield our hearts to Him with gratitude and

submission, that we may experience His power in purging us, that we might bring forth more fruit.

To you who are strangers to this power, I address a few words. To you in whom the word of God has not yet taken root, I present Christ as a Saviour. Your sins are between you and the Father. Until these are removed, you cannot have any communion with Him. Christ can remove your sins, and present His blood in their place. Believe in Him, and He will do this; then you will have fellowship with Christ and communion with God, and bring forth fruit unto Him! The Lord direct your hearts to this! May He reveal Christ to all among us who may not yet know Him! The Lord bless His word to all who have heard it! The Lord bless it to all of us, and to His name be praise and glory. Amen.

Christ As The Searcher Of Hearts

Mark 10:1-46

It is a wonderful thing that the Lord came into this world and took all our sorrows and trials, but was entirely above them all. He was thus able to take up everything that was of God, and at the same time to shew what the state of man really was, just as the word of God divides soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. As the perfect light and mind of God, it comes and dissects our hearts, recognising everything that is of God, and shewing what we are.

Here the Lord judges all that would attempt to take the cross in a legal sense, that which would deny God in natural goodness, and also the thought that there is some good in man. He has no idea of anything good in man for God, and at the same time all that is of God is put in its own proper place. He owns everything that God establishes in the world, and yet probes the heart to the bottom. There were some who condemned everything, as if God had made nothing good. God never denies nature, because He made it; but Christ goes deeper, and puts the probe to the centre of man’s intents and thoughts, yet He knows how to divide between them, and thus shews His perfectness. He was the perfectly obedient Son, who must be about His Father’s business. He had power to own everything that was of God, and, if there was occasion, to be subject to it; but He had power too to detect everything of man, and that we have to learn, to have ourselves totally and fully judged. There is progress in seeing it, but we cannot go to God at all unless self is judged. There is a danger too

of not getting with God above the evil. Here the Lord, in the exercise of His own blessed grace, can take notice of His own works—all He has done and all He has made; and it is just this One who can also discern what man is. He can say, “Consider the lilies”; not that they were of any value. But I find the blessed Lord, the Man of sorrows, who felt the sin all around, who looked for comforters and found none, and (except where His grace wrought) getting nothing but hatred for His love, yet so completely with God practically (He was God over all) that He was above evil. That principle is fully manifested in Him, and is to be looked for in us. It is not condemning the sins of nature and recognizing it, nor yet saying that man is all bad, or I falsify the holy nature of God. What meets the power of evil is, that He gave His life a ransom. But there is evil all around us, and it is apt to hinder our being gracious, and to get power over us, and that hinders our having power over it, and over ourselves, and judging ourselves, as well as presenting grace, and basking in the sunshine of God’s favour.

Our natural tendency is to get pleasures for self. Innocent they may be, but they take the heart from God; they are spoiled by sin. People ask the harm of these things. The question is, What use are you making of them, and where is your heart? The moment there is a turning from the cross (death to everything), our Lord says, “Get thee behind me,” for that is all He has. He is going to Jerusalem, and they are amazed, and as they follow they are afraid. There I get the way the cross makes me afraid of following Christ; but He says, If you do not take it up, you cannot be my disciple. The Lord judges man totally, and utterly; we cannot go too deep. People say, If man is not good, he can be made so. But

the thing Christ brings us to is, “In me dwells no good thing.” There is no good in talking of good fruit when the tree is bad; there are self-will and lusts. Then we see that before we take up the cross for ourselves there is the cross for us. He suffered, and gave His life a ransom. There my sins were put away, and the old nature judged. I have died, and my life is hid with Christ in God. I am alive to God, not to Adam. That separates me from the world. Christ is my righteousness and my life up there. He has given me His Spirit, and I look down from there in grace, being an object of His favour, at what is of His hand in the creation. When I have got out of it, I can look at it. He had a divine view of the world. He can judge man’s heart as man’s heart, and at the same time admire the beauty of the lilies. Though He was with God, and was God, He could not despise the work of His hand. Everything was corrupted, even the brute creation, through man; but whenever anything had the stamp of God, He could see it. We have to learn this, and it is difficult; but I do look that Christians should walk with God. Either a man is letting his mind go after what the flesh likes, or he is applying the cross to it. If you admire a flower you see, all right; but if you care for it, all wrong. I can see the hand of God in its beauty, but if I am thinking of the thing it is not the beauty, but my own will and inclination. The Lord runs the sharp edge of His word in, dividing between soul and spirit.

First, He takes up marriage, and says, God allowed divorce for the hardness of their hearts; but it was not so at first. There is natural affection; but if it gets hold of us it may become idolatry. A child or a husband may take our heart from God, but being without affection is one of the signs of the last times. In the last days men

are not only not spiritual, but they are not natural. The Lord puts His seal on every relationship. It is an awful thing, even if a child is not converted, to see it failing in affection to its parent; and the nearer the relationship, the more dreadful it is. God owns the relationships, and it is a sign of the last days to be wanting in the affections proper to them.

Then we get the Lord greatly displeased at the disciples sending away the children, not that there was no sin in the children, but they were the expression of what God had created—the confidingness of a child without the distrust that grows up with one. The world lives in distrust (miserable at root), but that is not the case with a child. It has no distrust, but a disposition to believe everything (it often gets cheated); and the Lord says that is what He likes. Unless you receive the kingdom as a child you will not enter it.

Then I find a thoroughly lovely character, and the Lord "beholding him, loved him." It was not the love of God to the world, nor the special love of relationship and grace for His own; but the Lord loved what was lovely—a ready, willing mind to learn everything. The young man had no idea of the ruin of man. He does not say, "What shall I do to be saved?" or Christ would have given him no such answer. He takes him on the ground of a Jew (v. 19), and the young man answers, "All these have I observed from my youth." The Lord does not say, You have not; but beholding him, He loved him. He saw what was lovely in his character (and we ought to see natural loveliness); but his conscience must be touched, and his heart was unknown to himself. "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and take… up the cross," v. 21. He went away sorrowful. The instant the state is detected the

loveliness vanishes. His character was lovely in its ingenuousness; but when it is searched and detected his heart comes out as a thing in which there was nothing for God. He deceived himself as to man's state; but there was natural loveliness in him (and we often meet unselfish, amiable characters). How does the Lord meet it? He says, "There is none good save one, that is God." There is no such things as a good man in the world. You are totally on wrong ground. There is none good but God is a principle. Why do you call Me good if you come to Me as a man? The Lord takes him up on the ground of law that he was on, and says, Don't say man is good, but keep the law.

Another thing comes out. The disciples say, "Who then can be saved?" And the Lord tells them, "With men it is impossible." There is no such thing as being saved on man's ground; but God can save by His Son. That is another thing (v. 27). By man it is impossible; but the means of being saved has reached man. He can get eternal life; but when his heart is detected it is totally wrong. This young man turned away with sorrow and grief; for his heart was with his money. The gospel does not deny natural loveliness; but that will not do with God. It will not do for Him to have no vile ones. He looks for the vilest sinners (the thief on the cross, for instance), and takes them to paradise. He does not take the pretty flowers and leave the weeds. What man calls goodness is often abominable selfishness; and they say, If that man does not go to heaven, who will? They do not know the heart a bit. The supreme goodness of God takes up the one that will not have God and Christ, and will have his lusts and pleasures, and saves him. "All things are possible with God." The gospel does not build

on what is there, but judges it. The flowers of a wild apple may be as pretty as others, but there is no fruit on it. What Christ says is, Where is your heart? Have you not a will, and the thoughts of your heart and your conduct in everything moved by it? And the answer of it is only hatred to God.

That is very humbling, but it puts the gospel on the right ground. There was unspeakable love to sinners, with all their sins. He was ever moved at oppression and sorrow —never at insult or outrage to Himself, but always moved with compassion for man— “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He brings all this goodness to where we are, but He must detect the conscience. He will not build the goodness of God on ours, and deceive us. The Lord lays the young man’s heart bare. He does not drive him away; He never drove any one away; but he went away because his heart was never reached. Self must be detected— “All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” When I learn His goodness in coming in grace into this world to win our hearts, I say, “Search me, O Lord, and try my heart.” I know He has not come to impute sin, and I come into His presence with an open heart. The moment I fully trust this blessed love of Christ my place is that of the man to whom the Lord imputes no sin. He has given His life a ransom, and put it all away. He lays bare our hearts, but gives us confidence; so that we desire to have everything out before God, and the whole ground we stand on before Him is “truth in the inward parts.” He stood where I was, and now I stand where He is, and that is the only place I have before God. The Christian stands between accomplished redemption and the glory,

at liberty with God and from the world and sin. We may fail and grieve the Spirit, but there we are set.

The disciples are thinking, What is the meaning of this, that this lovable character is driven away, and cannot come to God? Well, the very grace that has come to seek and save, drives away the natural heart because it cannot bear it. It detects the heart, and must claim it for God both as Creator and Redeemer. They were still looking to tack the new thing on to the old, looking for the glory in a carnal way. The Lord says, You must take up the cross and follow me. If you follow Me, I can give you the cross; that is all I have to give you now. He takes the lowly place as to man and the world; death was all He had for those who followed Him (v. 38-40). “Can you drink of the cup that I drink of?” They say, “Yes,” deceiving themselves. He says, “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of” (not atonement, but suffering) — you will have to suffer if you take up the cross and follow Me really. You shall be like Me, and close to Me too; but what you must reckon on is the cross, if you are going to glory. “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.” Not that there is not joy, “a hundred fold now in this time”; but He says, I must have your hearts: I have to die, and if you are going to follow me, the road I am going is to the cross, that is the path I am going to the glory. Are you ready to take up your cross, or have you a question if the cross is right, or if there is any other road? The Lord knew none, and I know none.

There is another point. If we were perfect, all would be simple; but we have a great deal to learn and to detect and correct. At this time the Lord set His face

steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, and the disciples want to know the meaning of it. “The Jews sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?” “As they followed they were afraid.” Not only will and lust were detected, but they were afraid of following Christ. Do not you know what that is? The instant you are following Christ there is the consciousness that the world is against you. Nicodemus went to the Lord by night because he was afraid to go by day. There is the instinctive consciousness that the world is against us, and we are afraid to confess Christ in our habits, our houses, etc. It is very base, but there it is. Paul says what things were gain to him he counted loss for Christ; he did not go away sorrowful. He says, I am glad to get rid of it (it is dross and dung) “to win Christ.” There was the energy and power of the Spirit. Did Paul follow trembling? Not at all. Five times forty stripes save one—beaten, stoned, all sorts of things! It was all on the road, and he had real liberty, “always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus.” These disciples did not dare leave the Lord; they kept in the way, for here was eternal life in Him and nowhere else; but they had no liberty. When He spoke of the cross Peter says, “That be far from thee”; and the Lord says, “Get thee behind me, Satan” —the very man who had confessed Him as the Christ, and to whom He had said, “Blessed art thou.” But if he will not take up the cross, he is “Satan.” “Thou art an offence unto me.” The cross deals with all that is of man, and where there is the willing spirit and blessed free liberty with God, the power of Christ rests upon us, and it is no sacrifice to give up human righteousness, or all I possess if need be, that I may win Christ; they are only weights as I run the race.

Natural affection we are. to have by the power of God; but the Lord is in heaven, and the cross is the path, because though we are in a world where there are a thousand needed things, and all richly to enjoy, when it is a question of what our hearts are, there is none good. Christ has been rejected, and I am dead to the world, sin, and the law, and alive to God. It should be so more practically every day with willing hearts. Our steps are feeble, but He shews us the way, and we delight in His love. Of course the Spirit reproves us, instead of bringing us joy, if we are grieving Him.

How far have our hearts believed this voice of the blessed Son of God in such love, when He puts forth His own sheep, going before them, meeting the dangers and leading them in the path? How far are our hearts in truth and simplicity disposed to follow Him, to think His love not mistaken in the path He has marked out? It is real deliverance from the flesh; but we must trust His love. When my heart thoroughly trusts Christ, it is His cross and His reproach; and it has the sweetness of Christ, and all is sweet (we may be cowards in it), and we judge everything that hinders His leading us in the path.

The Lord give us to trust Him, that we may have courage to follow Him, and learn what this poor world is!

God’s Grace And Man’s Need

Matthew 15:1-28

Here we have the wonderful contrast between the ways and actings of man’s heart towards God, and the ways and actings of God’s heart towards poor guilty man. These two things must be brought close the one to the other, and be shewn as they rightly are. Men’s hearts were not fully put to the test before the Lord Jesus came (John 15:22-24): “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.” It was all fully brought out then; and what man’s heart was was plainly proved. When he saw God, he hated Him.

Although God was present in the midst of Israel, He was not openly revealed. He was hid within the veil, within which the high priest, shrouded in a cloud of incense, alone approached His holy throne. Neither did man’s heart come up there to see the holiness of it; nor did man come down fully to man. It was not the full revelation of God. It was that which could leave man in a good deal of darkness, and God hid; and therefore that which could not clearly detect man’s heart. Consequently He says, “If I had not come, they had not had sin”: not that they had not sinned; but that the Lord would not hold them finally guilty until He had manifested Himself in Him of whom He had spoken to Israel. But when God was made manifest, man hated Him. God had before revealed a great deal, but not

Himself. He revealed much in the figures of the law, and which foreshadowed and veiled better things; and we find the use man made of it. I am not here speaking of the law, as trying man's conscience; though, in passing, we may notice that too, as bringing in—not sin, for that was there already—but transgression. The use God made of it was to prove man a sinner. It was used to make manifest—in fact, to create—transgression.

To turn for a moment to the use man made of the law, in contrast with God's purpose in it: God used it, as we have seen, that the offence might abound—that sin might appear exceeding sinful. Man set about to make himself righteous by the very thing by which God was proving him a sinner, and sin exceedingly sinful. This you are doing, if you are seeking to satisfy the demands of God's righteousness by your own ways. Man seeks to save himself by the righteousness of the law; but God's use was not that, for He never thought of saving any but by Jesus. When a child is forbidden by its parent, by an express law, and breaks the law, it not only makes manifest the evil disposition that is in its heart, but there is then positive disobedience, and the consciousness of sin, in that which the child does. It might have followed its inclination in many cases before, without consciousness of sin; but now not so: the conscience is affected and defiled; and by the law we are under condemnation and death.

To return to the figures and shadows of better things. Man took those very ceremonies and sacrifices, which were typical of that one sacrifice which sin had made necessary, and by them, their conscience nothing satisfied, tried to eke out their own righteousness; and they follow the same course now. We know that there

were a great many sacrifices for sin under the law: for God has tried this way, that we might know its incapacity of bringing us to Him. To employ similar means is mere superstition, and denial of Christ. Men first set about to be righteous by commands which they cannot fulfil; and then they seek to add ceremonies, to eke out a righteousness of their own. That is the sum of the religion of so many—making an attempt at keeping the law, and adding ceremonial observances thereto, and then attaching the name of Christianity to it, while all God's truth is shut out.

Further, after all, the conscience never will be satisfied; because there will be the dread of that day when God shall make manifest the secrets of the heart. The soul is not on the road to have a conscience at peace with God. Travelling on this road, the man will go on from one thing to another. He may add ceremony to ceremony, and tradition to tradition, but he has only got farther from God—he has only got more between God and his conscience, and no forgiveness after all. The conscience gets satisfied for a moment or two by man's dealing with it in.this way; but there is no peace with God. When sin is brought into the presence of God's holiness, the conscience, if not despairing, gets hardened. See what a state those Jews were in who could go and buy Christ's blood for thirty pieces of silver, and yet have scruples of conscience as to where the price of blood should be put —refusing to put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood! Anything will suit man, provided it is not his conscience in the presence of God. Where He is detecting the state of heart, and making it know complete forgiveness, so that it can be in His presence without sin, it is another thing. Nothing is more simple

than this, glorious as is the grace that has wrought it; indeed, it is too simple for those who are not taught of God to love the truth. But, simple as it is, man's conscience is thus in the presence of God, and anything suits man rather than that.

Though God is infinitely high, He is very simple to man's wants, and to man's conscience. The washing the hands is not that which signifies, but that which comes from the heart. Here we have something more simple than all the intricacies of ceremony and tradition. God's light deals with realities; and God's purpose is, by the powerful light of His Spirit, to bring into the conscience of man all the different evils of his heart. When God's light shines in, that evil of which the conscience before took no notice—a vain thought or the like, that passed and was forgotten—is now made manifest. That which comes out of the heart is what defiles a man.

God is dealing with realities. He wants nothing from man. He is shewing him what he is. He is bringing into man's conscience what is already in his heart. When God's light shines in, it detects what is in the heart, and thus there is a manifestation to a man's conscience of all that comes out of his heart. That light soon teaches him the vanity of washing his hands, and such things (v. 2-8). It tells him that to draw near to God with his mouth, and honour Him with his lips, while his heart is far from Him, is all in vain. It shews him that all mere ceremonial offerings and prayers are worse than useless. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." The light detects the evil of man's heart (v. 11-20): "Not that which goeth into the mouth, but that which cometh out of the mouth, defileth a man. For out of the

mouth proceed evil thoughts, murders," etc. Thus God's light comes in and shews what comes out of the heart. Take the first index of what is there, when seen and expressed in the light—an idle word, perhaps (James 3). But farther, the Lord does not say, simply, You have done this or that, but He traces the evil to the root. He traces the conduct or the words of man to some source—to what? to the heart! If there are idle and corrupt words, there is an idle and corrupt heart; and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. That is what man's nature is, what he is. So that, though men have the fairest conduct outwardly, God unmasks what is within, and shews the vanity of all their outward ceremonies as a means of eking out a righteousness of their own. He regards not the mere outward conduct of man, but measures the heart; and tracing all the evil to that, asks, Why is this? For out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts (v. 19), and there He closes with man. His purpose, in all these dealings and ways with man, is to shew him what he is before God.

Then we turn to the other side of the picture, in which God's heart is brought out (in the case of the woman of Canaan) (v. 21-28). This woman had not the pride of human distinction in which the Jews gloried. She was neither a Jewess nor a Pharisee—quite the contrary; she belonged to a city which God had held up as a most reprobate city; Matt. 11:21. She was a Syrophoenician—a Canaanite—of a race held in the Old Testament to be accursed (Gen. s:25-27), whence nothing of repentance could be expected. The Lord comes into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, peopled by the descendants of Canaan ("cursed is Canaan "). That is where grace ever comes. And she was one of these outcasts in the fullest sense of

the word. She had no privileges, no claims. Well, she recognises Him here as the Lord,, the Son of David, and salutes Him as such. As such she knew what mercies He had brought among the Jews; and she comes and asks for blessing. He does not answer her a word. He takes no notice of her whatever. His ear was closed to her request, at least so far as that He gave her no answer. A repentant Jew might have appealed to Him under this title. He was in the place of the promise which Messiah came to accomplish. “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” v. 24. But for this there must be some claim to the promise. If you meet Christ on the ground of what He is as promised to Israel, you must have some fitness for the promise, some claim to it. If you are seeking by righteousness to get the help of grace, that is not my errand, says Christ; I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Why is there no answer? the heart may say; for she had recognised His lordship. She had, and could have no claim on or connection with Him on that ground; with the Son of David a Canaanite had nothing to do. The disciples were anxious to get rid of her by satisfying her demand, but He would not allow it; He holds to God’s order. If she came to the Son of David to get help, she must come as a Jew. But here (v. 25) she gets a step farther, she ceases to address Him as the Son of David (the ground on which she supposed, giving Him the due honour, she might expect something), and her sense of want constrains her to cry out, “Lord, help.”

Are there none here expecting that, because they entitle Christ aright, because they give Him His due title, and honour Him, He must answer them, and are astonished that He does not? The poor woman felt her sorrow; she

wanted something, and there was the simple expression of her need; but, even then, He answers, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs.” My errand is from God; I do not go beyond that. Her owning and addressing Him as the Son of David was in the way of righteousness, which was true. Her need still makes her go forward, and she says, “Lord, help mc! “But He answers, I am come to the children—to seek for fruit on the vine which God owns. You might think God would own righteous, well-conducted people, and that they might then take the fruits and blessings God attached to that. But you have no claim on that ground: you are sinners. As far as God’s ways were revealed outwardly, the Jews were God’s people. But she was outside everything—a dog. She is looked upon as a dog, and she now takes the place of a dog. What now, being a dog, could she hope for? Why not give up hope? Why, because she abandons all title and claim in herself, but the need which cast itself on pure bounty; and there was, she asserted, an overflowing abundance of grace, which could even give some supply to the dogs: “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

There was bounty in the house of God for dogs themselves. Be it she was a dog; she made no pretence to take the children’s place, and therefore it was no answer to her to call her that, because the Master could look beyond the children, and there was an overflowing supply of grace and fulness that did not leave even the dogs without provision (v. 27). And such was the poor woman’s real state. She knew the Master of the house was infinitely rich. She knew God and Jesus ten thousand times better than the disciples around. She

knew that there were bounty and plenty enough in the Master's house, and from that superabounding supply of grace He could let the dogs eat. The vilest and the most hopeless could find food in the Master's house. The real understanding of God is according to our understanding of our total vileness and nothingness. Israel had never understood divine love as it was here exhibited to the dogs—fathomed by her need— fathomed by her wretchedness. She reached up to the source from whence even the children are fed—the fulness of the love of God Himself, which did not shut even dogs out from His bounty. She passed by all dispensation, even to what God Himself had done, seeing He had come down, not to hide His holiness, but to shew what He really was; and when the sinner was brought to a confession of her own nothingness, He swept away everything between the sinner and Himself, as He did with the woman of Samaria.

She had arrived at what God was. He had done away with that which brought man a little nearer to Him, that is, ordinances, etc.; and He now comes down to shew what He is, and what man is; and when man comes to his true and real standing, God is there to meet him in all His unlimited grace. Law was given by Moses, and was but a veil; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The full truth of what man's heart is is brought out by the revelation of God in Christ. Now there was not any one between God and man to veil His holiness or to conceal His love; not even any oft-repeated sacrifice; not even a Moses with a veil on his face; but man must deal with God Himself—with God in Christ. And here, you see, the Lord would not satisfy this poor woman on any other plea but on that of her own real character. He calls

her really what she was, and she understood that there was in God's heart all that the Lord Jesus Christ had seen in it when He was in heaven, for He was here to shew it. And, supposing she had been something more than a dog, she would not have needed so much grace. It is our vileness which brings out that wonderful grace which God gave. For, if she had been in less need, what would have been the consequence? Why, that there would have been less grace manifested in God.

And what is the great truth in Christianity that is brought out by all this? That the veil is rent from the top to the bottom; and that man, as he is, is in the presence of God— the man is there unveiled. What have we got in the cross? The first thing is, God dealing with man in His own presence? But how? Did He come to require anything? Nothing; how should He come and require it? In a certain sense He did require fruit from the vine, but there was none. What then did He come for? why did He come into a world full of sin? what did He seek there? He sought sinners! Did He come here ignorant of the extent of their sin? No, for He knew what was in man's heart full well before He came. He knew their sin well. He knew all that would come upon Him. But what stops the sinner? Not that he is to come to God— we see the Lord Jesus Christ come down to him in his sins. Is there anything between Him and the sinner? No, my friends— nothing; not even His disciples. They might quiet and get rid of importunity, but neither shew God's holiness nor reveal His love. It was the prerogative of His own love to come and touch the sinner without being defiled by the sin: just as He did to the leper. The leper exclaimed, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The Lord puts forth His hand and touches Him, saying, "I

will; be thou clean." And remember, if He came to shew God's love to man in his sins, so that his heart might be won, and have confidence with God, He came to take away sin from man by taking it upon Himself.

The veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom, I see the holiness of God: but the very stroke which has thus unveiled the holiness of God has put away the sin that would have hindered my standing in the presence of that holiness. I see what God in His love has done for us in the Person of Christ. I see that the bruising of His Son has taken place. Here I get God Himself coming down to me, and I am enabled now to go back with Christ into the rest of His holiness. In the death of Christ I see the fearful vengeance of God against sin; and the rending of the veil, which displays God's holiness and love to man. And so the more the eye of God scrutinises and searches me, the more it brings out the blessed truth, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. It shews the whiteness of the robe that has been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

If I hesitate to stand in His presence, I am putting in question the value of Christ's precious blood. You may say, I hope to be saved. You cannot hope that Christ will die for you! It cannot be a matter of hope whether Christ is to die! The way the heart reasons is, I am not hoping Christ will die for me, but I hope to get an interest in Him; I want a proof of His love. When you question this, you question whether Christ has become the friend of publicans and sinners; and, further, you question the power of His blood.

Suppose you had a title to demand some proof of His love, what could you demand more than what God has

given? He has given His own Son. You could not ask so much as He has already given. But if I am seeking that God should tell me something else, I am seeking some other revelation than what He has given me. He rests my peace on believing the one He has given. The soul that has come to God knows that He is love, and it is to Himself we are come.

The very way in which I know God is through faith in His Son. I know His own love, that He thought of this, and did it for me. Why is it the soul does not get this wondrous simple peace, to be in His own presence without a cloud on His love? Because we are telling to God, and to our poor hearts, something short of this—that we are dogs. Grace is to the sinner, and to none other. If I can stand before God in my own righteousness, grace is not needed. He will bring down your hearts to your real contrition. There He can act in the fulness of His grace, according to the need of the heart that has discovered its need in His presence. He is manifesting that grace according to the value of the sacrifice, now that He is at the right hand of God. Not merely now that God can come to the sinner, but the cleansed sinner stands accepted in the presence of God—accepted in the Person of Jesus; and that nothing stands between us and God. The Lord give us only to own the fulness of His grace, and see the way in which we are debtors to Him, who was willing to suffer all things that He might present us spotless to God. Amen.

Two Warnings And An Example

Being The Substance Of A Lecture On Matthew 26

We have here an example in the case of Jesus, and two warnings in Peter and in Judas. In Peter we may learn the weakness, and in Judas the dreadful wickedness, of the flesh. We get in Jesus what we should aim after. In Judas we see the mere professor, in Peter the saint sifted. All three are before us in a time of searching trial, and the result of trial is seen in each. We ought to remember that we have received the Holy Ghost, which Peter had not when he denied the Lord; yet, having the Holy Ghost, we may still learn a lesson from Peter's flesh. And is not the entire worthlessness of the flesh among the last things we learn? In Peter we see what the flesh is. There is no real living upon the hope of the glory, except in measure as the flesh is mortified and brought under subjection.

I would dwell, first, upon Judas's apostasy. He had all the appearance to men of being as the other disciples; he had companied with the Lord, he had been one of those sent forth to preach the gospel and work miracles; but his conscience never was before God. He might have truth in his understanding (and, indeed, the understanding does not generally receive truth so readily where the conscience is affected). Again, Judas could not have walked three years with Jesus, and seen His grace and love, and not have had his affections moved. But then his conscience had never been brought into exercise before God. So it is with many. If we watch the saint receiving truth, we shall often find him slow of apprehension. There is something to be judged before

God; something which condemns him, and which involves sacrifice. For instance, we see most clearly that the precious blood cleanses from all sin; but only let us commit sin—and how slowly do we apprehend that blessed truth so as to get the comfort of it! In the latter case the conscience is at work. In like manner the affections of the unconverted may be moved —a great company of women followed Christ at the crucifixion, bewailing and lamenting Him! So we read of “anon with joy” receiving, and “by and by” [or anon, for it is the same word], when tribulation arises, turning away.

The natural man wants something to satisfy self before God; and, until he has done with himself, he will be looking for a certain measure of righteousness before God. He may have been, in connection with this want, instructed in the gospel, and thus the understanding may be clear, and the affections moved: but, unless the conscience be bare before God, there is no life. Here was Judas betraying his Master! After all, what was this? Nothing more, at the bottom, than what was in every heart. Judas loved money—no uncommon lust. And the love of money in a saint nowadays is as bad, or worse, as being done more in the light.

There was sin in Judas’s nature: which sin shewed itself in the shape of the love of money. The next thing was, Satan suggesting a way of gratifying this lust, for he loved money more than he loved Jesus. And now we find the result of outward nearness to the Lord while the conscience is unaffected—it was to make Judas reason upon circumstances. He thought, probably, the Lord would deliver Himself, as He had done before; for, when he found it not so, he threw down the money, and said, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent

blood." He continues in this nearness to Christ, until, thirdly, we read that "after the sop Satan entered into him." In the condition of hypocrisy he gets his heart hardened; and then Satan gets between his conscience and all hope of pardon. Many a natural man would not betray a friend with a kiss, as Judas soon after did. His nearness served to harden him; and he actually took the sop from the hand of the Lord! Even natural feeling was silenced. So it is when the unconverted man gets into a similar position. He becomes more vile than ever. His heart is hardened. Hypocrisy, and at length despair, ensues. Such is the flesh and its end. And the flesh cannot be bettered by ordinances, even where Christ Himself is. Such is the flesh—I can hardly say, when left to itself, for man is never left to himself, he is never really independent. He has the will to be so; therefore he is perfectly a sinner, but if disobedient, he is servant to his lust, "disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures," and slave to Satan. A natural man has a conscience and shame. He will not do in the light what he would do in the dark. But the outward form of Christianity, where it has not touched the heart, only makes this difference, that his conscience is seared, and he is only more subtly the slave of Satan.

I turn now to the contrast afforded by what is seen in Peter with what we see in our blessed Lord. In Jesus we see the obedient, the dependent One, expressing His entire dependence by His praying. And there was seen an angel from heaven strengthening Him. He felt the weakness which He had given Himself up to bear; He was "crucified in weakness." "All my bones," He says, "are out of joint, my heart is melted like wax in the midst of my bowels." "My soul is exceeding sorrowful,

even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me." So in the earlier temptation, we hear Him answering the devil out of the word of God. Jesus might have sent Satan away by divine power, but this would have been no example to us. So, in this chapter, we see the Lord praying!

If you compare what Peter is doing with what the Lord is doing, you learn the secret of Peter's weakness and the Lord's strength. What was the effect of trial upon the weakness of Peter's flesh? He had said, "I will go with thee to prison and to death"; but the Lord has to say to him, "could ye not watch with me one hour? "They were sleeping for sorrow. Here was neither prison nor death! "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation" (not merely that there be no transgression). Peter entered into temptation; Jesus never did at all. Yet the trial was far greater to Jesus. Jew and Gentile were against Him, and behind them the power of Satan. "This," said He, "is your hour, and the power of darkness"; and again, "my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Where does He take all this? The Lord does not sleep and seek to forget His sorrow. He goes and prays to the Father. His eye rested not on the circumstances to think of them. He looked to His Father. Not that He did not feel; for He said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." It was weakness here as man, and that is real strength.

Remember, if we are in entire dependence, the temptation does not meet us at all. Jesus does not say, 'shall I not go through all these trials?' but "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" He does not see Pilate or Judas in it; it was not Satan that had given Him the cup, but His Father. So with us; if in a

frame of entire dependence, temptation does not touch us at all! Trial comes; but, like Jesus, we can say of it, “the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” Every trial becomes a blessed occasion for perfecting obedience, if near God; if otherwise, a temptation! Jesus was walking with God. It was not that He did not feel weakness. “Tarry ye here, and watch with me,” shews the weakness of human condition fully felt. As in Psalm 22:14, referring to the cross, He says, “I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint: my heart is melted like wax in the midst of my bowels.” And yet He shrank not from suffering alone when love to His disciples called for it. “If ye seek me, let these go their way.” But being in an agony, He prays the more earnestly; it drives Him to His Father; and that before the trial comes. Then what is the next thing? When the trial actually comes, it is already gone through with God! He presents Himself before them saying, “whom seek ye?” as calmly as if going to work a miracle. Whether before Caiaphas or Pontius Pilate, He makes a good confession; owns Himself Son of God before the Jews, and King before Pilate.

How comes this difference? In the first place with Peter the flesh is sleeping; he goes to sleep to get rid of the pressure of circumstances. Peter has not gone through the trial with the Father. At the moment when Jesus is going to be led away, the energy of the flesh wakes up, and Peter draws the sword. The flesh has just energy enough to carry us into the danger where it cannot stand—that energy deserts us then. How little real communion is here! When Christ was praying, Peter was sleeping; when Christ was submitting as a lamb led to the slaughter, Peter was fighting; when Christ was

confessing in suffering, Peter was denying Him with cursing and swearing. This is just the flesh: sleeping when it ought to be waking; in energy when it ought to be still; and then denying the Lord when the time of trial comes. With Christ it was agony with the Father, but perfect peace when the trial came. Oh, if we knew how to go on in all circumstances in communion with the Father, there would be no temptation that would not be an occasion of glorifying Him!

The great thing was, Peter had not learned what the flesh is: he did not keep in memory the weakness of the flesh; and thus the condition of dependence was hindered. He seems to be sincere in wishing to own the Lord Jesus and not deny Him. There was more energy of natural and very true affection in Peter than in those who forsook the Lord and fled. He really loved the Lord. Peter fails, not from self-will, not from willing to sin, but through the weakness of the flesh. In Christ there was no possible moral weakness, because He always walked in the place of weakness in communion with His Father. Jesus goes—through agony itself—with the Father. Peter fails, though but the shadow of temptation comes to him. All Peter's fall began by want of dependence, and by neglecting prayer. We must be watching "unto prayer "; not merely ready to pray when temptation comes, but walking with God, and so meeting it in the power of previous communion and prayer. Without continual prayer, and constant sense of entire weakness in self, the more love to Christ, and the more good-will to serve Him are in a saint, the more certainly will he, by that very good-will, be led into the place in which he will dishonour Christ! The other disciples that fled did not so much dishonour the name of their Master as Peter did.

It was thus Peter had to learn the evil of the flesh. Jesus, on the contrary, ever walked in the confession of dependence— always praying. And what use did the Lord make of His knowledge of Satan's purpose to sift Peter? He prayed for him! The more knowledge, dear brethren, the more prayer! "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." As the result of this intercession, Peter learnt the evil of the flesh more deeply than the others, and was able to "strengthen his brethren."

We are incapable of ministering truth to our brethren unless we are conscious of weakness in ourselves. Without the prayer of Jesus, where would Peter have been? He was running nearly like Judas. Oh, what a blessed thing to be kept in entire consciousness of weakness, instead of running on like Peter into a place where we cannot stand! How good to be afraid to take a single step without the Lord's guidance! The flesh is ever playing us false—it is good for nothing. The effect of keeping it in the Lord's presence is to have done with it—to be cast on the Father. There is no wisdom that will stand us in any stead but the wisdom that is from above. The Lord knew what the flesh was, and what Paul needed, when he had been caught up into the third heaven. To be taken up to a fourth? No; but a messenger of Satan to buffet: that is, he needed to be brought down. There is the thorn in the flesh given him; there is to be the consciousness that the flesh is worth nothing.

We may notice that there are three ways of learning the powerlessness and wretchedness of the flesh: prior to peace, often in desperate struggles (for knowledge and conscience are distinct things); when we have peace, before the Lord in prayer and communion, not daring to take a step till He leads us, and then He is glorified in us

in grace and obedience, whatever the trial; or in the bitter experience in which Peter learned it, when flesh is not judged in communion with God. This last will be the way, so long as we are judging of things instead of judging ourselves. When we are faithfully judging ourselves and walking with God, we shall enter into no temptation. Trial may come, but there will be full preparation to meet it; not that we may be able to say, Now I am prepared for this or that temptation. We are in no certainty from one moment to another as to what trial may be coming; but we shall have the strength of God with us in it. Therefore our only safe place is watching and prayer—yes, prayer before the assault—prayer that may amount to agony; for so Jesus prayed!

We must expect to have our souls much exercised; often, it may be, when trial is there, casting about as to why this trial is sent. It may be for a fault; it may be for some careless or hard state of soul. It may be, as Paul's, to keep down the flesh; it may be preparatory to some coming conflict. But in these exercises of soul we must keep before the Lord: then, when the trial comes for which the Father has been training us, there will be perfect peace. The Lord will make you bear in spirit with Him, when exercised, the burden which He will make you bear in strength in the battle. Do not shrink from inward exercise; settle it with Him. There is no limit to our strength for obedience when our strength is the Lord's.

"If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." None of our souls can estimate what that cup was for One who had dwelt essentially in the Father's love; but the most spiritual will most acknowledge it. Then the Holy One was made sin; no gleam of light on the soul of Jesus. At

the thought of it, when pressed by Satan on His soul, we see Him sweating as it were great drops of blood. He did not think lightly of sin! The Prince of life was brought into the dust of death— “all thy billows passed over me.” At the cross Jesus bore what you will never be called to bear. Beware of denying Him. Many do so in detail who in the main acknowledge Him. Our happy privilege is, not to be occupied with the trial as a trial, but to see in every trial an opportunity of obeying God, and to say of each, as Jesus did, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? “

“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 God, our Saviour, be glory.”

Parables Of Luke 15

It is a wonderfully blessed thing to have One (the thoughts, and words, and ways of One down here, in His actings among men) who could so well manifest God, as the Lord Jesus.

We may look at the sin of man, at our sins, as a question to be judged of in the light of righteousness before God, and most important it is; but still, in one sense, God moves above all the evil, and asserts His right to shew what He is. And blessed is it for us, that God will be God in spite of sin. God is love; and if He will be God, He must be love, and that notwithstanding all the reasonings and murmurings of the heart of man against Him. God will act upon what I may call the feelings of His heart, and make them find their way into the hearts of men. And that is the reason there is such a freshness in certain passages of the word of God, however often we recur to them, because God especially reveals Himself in them. God never fails; the moment He speaks and reveals Himself, we have always the full blessedness of what He is. It is Himself who has come forth, and that with power to our hearts—the blessed God. He will take no character from man. If He has to deal with sin, and shew what it is, and how He has put it away, and the like, still above and through all He will manifest Himself. Now this is where our hearts get rest. We have the privilege to have done with ourselves in the house and bosom of God.

In a certain sense He hid Himself. Man could not have borne the manifestation of God in the brightness of glory; so He hid it in grace in the Person of the Son of

man. He clothed Himself in flesh: but the effect of the wicked and heartless reasonings of man's corrupt judgment was this; it forced Him to shew Himself what He really was as God. When He presented Himself as Messiah, the Son of man, the fulfiller of the law, and the like, this was not all the fulness of God. Man was always rejecting, constantly finding fault, carping at certain things with which he could not agree in the ways of Christ; but by thus pressing upon and urging Him, man only forced Him back as Christ to press out from Him what He really was as God. In the chapters which exhibit this, the soul is arrested and finds itself with unhesitating certainty in the presence of God Himself—in the presence of love. There we get rest and peace.

So in this chapter. He was forced to tell all the truth. God will be God. If there was that which could make God merry and glad, as it is expressed in the parable (and such was the case in the welcome of the poor prodigal son), He would have His own joy in spite of the objections of men. It is God's own joy to act in love; and that is just what men object to. They do not deny that He is going to judge (I do not of course speak of professed infidels); nor as a general principle do they object to God's being righteous, because their pride makes them think they can meet Him on that ground: but the moment He comes to have all His own full joy, and to bring out that which is the joy of heaven, man begins to object. It must not be all of grace; not God dealing with publicans and sinners thus! and why not? Because, what then becomes of man's righteousness? God dealing in grace makes nothing of man's righteousness; "there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Christ manifesting the light proved this;

pharisee and publican were alike detected; and man hated it. The thing that levels down the moral condition of man, bringing in grace to the sinner, is what man cannot bear. It is the setting up of what God is, and the putting down man.

What man is always seeking to do is, to make a difference between the righteousness of one man and another, so that character may be sustained before men. Slighting God's righteousness and magnifying our own, always go together. In John 8 we find brought by the scribes and pharisees before Jesus, one who by the law was worthy of being stoned— undeniably guilty—that He might be obliged to deny either mercy or righteousness. This was their motive. They thought to place Him in an inextricable difficulty. If He should let her off, He would break the law of Moses; but, should He say, 'let her be stoned,' it would be no more than Moses had done. How does He act? He let law and righteousness have all their course; but tells her accusers at the same time, "He that is without sin amongst you, let him first cast a stone at her." Conscience begins to work; not rightly, it is true, for their character was what they cared about; still it would speak; and they get out of the presence of light, because the light made manifest what they were—it proved them sinners. From the eldest to the youngest, all went out. He that had the reputation of the longest standing was glad to be the first to go away from that eye which could penetrate and detect what was within; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. He would not execute the law; for He came not to judge: "neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." That which is produced is only love. Whenever one stood before Him, or had anything to do with Him as a

detected and confessed sinner, it was always grace, and all grace. The more the discovered sin, the more grace was revealed, free and unqualified.

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.” And after all it may seem strange to many that, if God did come down here, He should take no notice of the righteousness of man, but be found in the company of publicans and sinners. Why, that would upset all the moral righteous thoughts of men; and that is what God has to do, because they are wrongly based.

In all the parables of this chapter put forth by Jesus, because grace had been objected to, in His dealings with publicans and sinners, we have this one great and blessed thought—God manifested. ‘I will suppose,’ it is to say, ‘a man in the worst and vilest possible condition you please; one reduced to the degradation of feeding with swine. But then there is something still behind all this that I am going to bring out; something which even your own natural hearts ought to recognise—the father’s delight in receiving back a child. Would not a father’s heart justify itself in its own feelings of kindness, let the condition of the child be what it may?

After weariness of heart in the world—after the Lord Jesus had gone through the world and found no place where a really broken heart could rest (He could find proud morality enough, but no place where a poor, wearied, broken heart could find sympathy and rest, to open it and give it life)—He came to shew that what could not be found for man anywhere else could be found in God. This is so blessed! that, after all, the poor

wearied heart, wearied with itself, with its own ways, wearied with the world and everything, can find rest in the blessedness of the bosom of the Father; and what it could not do in any other place—tell itself out—now that it has found God, it can; and that in truth of heart too, as we read in Psalm 32: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” So long as I am afraid of being blamed for what may be discovered, there is guile in the heart; but the moment that I know that all is forgiven, that nothing but love is drawn out by it, I can tell out all to God. The only thing that produces “truth in the inward parts” is the grace that imputes nothing. This is the secret of God’s power in setting hearts right with Himself— “there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.” There is all the difference possible between finding a man flying from God by reason of his conscience, and his finding in God one who says “neither do I condemn thee”; what in truth relieves and heals a conscience completely convicted. We cannot in our actual state, if under the law, and acknowledging its righteousness, take it into our own hands. If I take the law to smite you, I must kill myself; it is too sharp to handle. The man who would stone the adulteress must put his own head under the weight of the blow. “O wretched man that I am!” If I am a man, I am undone.

We have three parables presented to us in the chapter. The source of that which is taught in them all is love. The first parable is that of the shepherd who sought the sheep that was lost. The second that of the woman who sought the piece of money that was lost. The third, the father’s reception of the returning prodigal.

In the last it is not a question of seeking, but of the manner of the father's receiving the son when he had come back. And this is of much importance. Our souls need to understand it aright, as well as to know the great cardinal truth that God seeks the lost. There is many a heart that longs to go back, but does not know how he will be received. The Lord Jesus tells us the grace and love of God are shewn out, first in seeking, and then in the reception. In the first two parables we have the seeking; in the third, the reception by the father. One great principle runs through them all; it is the joy of God to seek and to receive the sinner. He is acting upon His own character. No doubt it is joy to the sinner to be received, but it is the joy of God to receive him: "it is meet that we should make merry and be glad" —not merely meet that the child should be glad to be in the house: the father is the happy one. The return of the prodigal is joy in heaven, whatever men, whatever Pharisees, may think about it.

Beloved friends, this is a blessed truth! It is the tone that God has raised, and that every heart in heaven responds to. It is something wonderfully lovely to be let into heaven in this way; and that, too by One who knew heaven so well. The chord which God strikes Himself heaven responds to and re-echoes, and so must every heart down here that is tuned by grace. What discord then must self-righteousness produce! Jesus tells forth the joy and grace of God in thus acting, the joy of heaven, and puts all this in contrast with the feelings of the elder brother—those of any self-righteous person—though the description be of the Jews.

It is this note sounded from heaven in love, that we read in the heart and ways of Christ down here: "The Son of

man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." And oh* how sweet! In one sense it is more sweet to have it here than up there. It is down here that this love of God (and it must be here, if man is to be reached) is astonishing; it is natural in heaven. It is here, on earth, amongst us, that God has manifested what He is—that He has delight in saving lost sinners; "which things the angels desire to look into."

The first thing the Lord Jesus does is to justify God in being good to sinners. He appeals at once to the natural heart of man. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep? "etc. The shepherd puts the sheep upon his shoulder, and brings it home rejoicing—have I not a right to seek lost sinners? Is it not a right thing for God to come among publicans and sinners? This may not suit a moral man, but it suits God; it is His privilege to come amidst sin—to come near to ruined sinners—because He can deliver out of it. The shepherd lays the sheep upon his shoulders and rejoices; he goes out to seek it, charges himself with it; he takes the whole toil of it. It was his own interest to do it, because he valued the sheep; it was his, and he brings it home again rejoicing. Thus He presents the shepherd here. And thus it is with "the Great Shepherd of the sheep." He presents it as His interest to "seek and to save that which is lost": He even makes it His interest in the sense of love; the sheep is His own, and He brings it home rejoicing, bidding others to rejoice with Him. There is the strength and power of salvation.

But how does the Lord set about it? We tell people sometimes to seek Christ. Well, in one sense that is right; for it is quite true that "he that seeketh findeth"; but He never said, "Come unto me," until He had first

come to them— come “to seek and to save that which was lost.” He did not say it from heaven, for the sinner could not go there; but because the poor sinner could not go to heaven to seek Christ, Christ came to the earth to seek him. He does not say to the poor leper, Come up to heaven; but comes Himself down to the leper in all his need, and says, “Be thou clean.” Had any other laid his hand upon the leper it would have made him as unclean as himself; Christ alone could touch the power of evil in the leper and have no contamination, but dispel it. He says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour … and I will give you rest.” It is not to be found here, any more than it was for Noah’s dove amidst the deluge. I have tried the world all through, and it is a sea of evil without a shore; Come to Me, and you will find rest. Who but Jesus could have said this?

There is another thing in the second parable—the painstaking of this love, its eager diligence with determination to succeed in seeking that which has been lost. It is not a sheep, but money in a house. Everything is done to get the money. The woman lights the candle, sweeps the house, she could not stop in the task of love —diligent active love, until the piece was found. It was her affair and interest again, because the money was hers. And then we have the joy when her possession is recovered; her own joy and the tone given to those who are called in to have communion with it: “Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost.” And that is the way of the Lord.

Thus we have the same great principle in this parable as in the former. There is the patient activity of love in the use of means by the Holy Spirit until the result is produced. In both parables we see the absolute actings

of grace, without any reference to the effect in the heart of the sinner; also, in both this great principle (common, as noticed before, to the three), God's own joy in love. It was the joy of the woman, as of the shepherd. Thus the result of man's pharisaic objection to grace was but the bringing out of the declaration by Jesus of the energetic power and activity of this grace, as well as the good will. There was entire inactivity in the sheep and in the money. The piece of money, as the sheep, could do nothing. The shepherd and the woman alike did all; it was their joy, who had lost, to get them back again, because they valued them. Worth nothing, in a certain sense, to God's love the sinner is immensely valuable.

It is true, at the same time, that there is a most important work—an effect produced in the heart of the one who has gone astray and is brought back again. On this account we have the third parable, which shews the feelings of the wanderer; and further, the manner of his reception. The father's heart and the prodigal's are both laid open. Not only are the inward workings of the prodigal told out, but we have also the manifestation of the father's heart. In a word, it is not the estimate formed by the one brought back about the love of the father, that gives the answer to all his thoughts, but the manifestation of his own heart by the father. There is this one simple fact— the father is on his neck kissing him! and that tells him what that heart is.

In this last parable the Lord takes up a case, meeting the objection of the Pharisees to His receiving publicans and sinners. He says, as it were, I will take the case of a man brought to the utmost degradation—eating husks with the swine (we must remember what swine were to the Jew), there too of his own choice. Why was the

picture drawn thus? To shew that nothing could put the sinner beyond the reach of grace. Trace it as far as you please; God will act as God at the end of the story. Let us look a little at the case in detail (v. 11-13). This is just our history as men. The son here was happier far, as a man, when going from home than when returning; he was doing his own will. And this is the secret of all sin. But remark, whether we are living in vice or not, we have all turned our back on God. The young man was as great a sinner when he stepped rich across his father's threshold, as when feeding with the swine in the far country; he had chosen to act independently of God, and that is sin. He reaped the fruits afterwards of this, no doubt, but that is not the question. Nay, in one sense, the very consequences of his sin were mercies, because they shewed him what his sin was.

But man makes a distinction between sinners. So the Lord puts a case where the sinner is gone, even in man's judgment, to the fullest degree of evil, and shews it does not outreach the grace of God—a case which wonderfully exhibits the truth, that "if sin abounds, grace does much more abound." When he first left the house he shewed where his heart was— alienated, revolted, gone; his back was turned upon his father and his father's house, and his face was towards the far country. He went forth to do his own will. A parent's heart will understand it. Our child sins against us—we feel it. We sin against God, and do not feel it. We are all of us in that sense children, that "have turned every one to his own way."

"And there," having reached the far country, he went on gaily in his own will as long as he could; "he wasted his substance in riotous living." Any person who lives

beyond his means looks rich for a time; so does the sinner, wasting his soul, seem happy. But if he thinks himself happy, he does so because he has got to a distance from God, where he has no restraint upon his will. But then, after all, he is in the devil's country, and enslaved to him. Liberty of will is just slavery to the devil.

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat: and no one gave unto him." There is no giving in the "far country," not even of husks. Satan sells all, and dearly—our souls are the price. You must buy everything. The world's principle is 'nothing for nothing'; everything must bring its price. Your gratifications there must be purchased at the sacrifice of reputation and soul. If you sell yourself to the devil, you will get husks: he will never give you anything. Would you find a giver, you must come to God. Hearts are not easy in the world; leave a man for a few hours to himself, and he will soon be in want; but it is never the effect of this merely to bring back to God. "He began to be in want," but his will was not touched yet. There are very few hearts that have arrived at a certain time of fife, that have not "begun to be in want." They go to seek in pleasure or in vice (in one thing or another, it matters not what; last of all, in God) something to satisfy them. The last thing the world thinks of is God: and then only when they are convinced that nothing else will do. They never think of the Father's house, for they know it not. If indeed they think of God, it is in judgment, not in

grace. A man of the world says, You must have everything that is in the world to know that the world cannot satisfy you; but the knowledge that all the world cannot satisfy would never turn a man to God. He must know more, even that he is perishing; not merely not satisfied, but ruined. So it was with the prodigal.

“When he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.” He awoke to the consciousness, “I perish with hunger”; and then it was he thought of “the father’s house,” the very place he had been so anxious to get away from at first. He had not yet understood how he would be received, yet he did understand that there was love in that house (the very hired servants had bread enough and to spare) j and he did understand, too, not only that he was hungry, but perishing with hunger. He wanted the goodness of that house; his was no mere abstract delighting in it. Wisdom and philosophy never found out God: He makes Himself known to us through our need; necessity finds him out. Who is it that really discovers the value of bread? The chemist? No; a hungry man. The sinner’s heart—yes, and the saint’s heart too—is put in its right place in this way. I doubt much if we have ever learned anything solidly, except we have learnt it thus. He knew that all was goodness there, the very servants were happy, and it was all over with him where he was; the need of his condition, all told him he must get back: “I will arise,” etc.; but he did not yet know the extent of that goodness. Every soul that

returns to God is thus brought to the thought of goodness in God.

We see the same thing in Peter (Luke 5). He goes and falls at the feet of Jesus, and says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” What an inconsistency! at the knees of Jesus, and yet telling Him to go away. And there is often this apparent inconsistency where there is a work in the conscience and the affections. God becomes necessary to us, and yet conscience says, I am too sinful. Peter felt his own worthlessness, and that Jesus was too holy, too righteous, to be with such an one as he; and yet he could not help going to Him.

Well, the prodigal goes back, glad to be in the father’s house, but having no true estimate of the father’s heart. No more worthy to be called a son, “make me as one of thy hired servants,” was still his thought. He measured the father’s love in some little degree by the sense of what he had done and the evil in which he had been; he thought to get into the place of a servant. Now there are a multitude of hearts in this state, lowering down the standard of what the Father must do to some sort of adaptedness to their fitness (I am not speaking of positive self-righteousness); they have still the remains of legalism, and would take the place of a servant in the house. Now God can only receive us in grace, because we have spent all, ruined ourselves, and forfeited every claim upon Him. Look at the history before us. This “make me as one of thy hired servants” will not do for the father, if it would do for the son; it would be constant misery to the father’s heart, as well as degradation to the son to receive and treat him thus! his very condition in the house a constant memorial of his sin! Neither would it be testimony to the servants in the house, as to

the father's love. The father cannot have sons in his house as servants; if boundless grace brings them, he must shew the manner of the reception to be worthy of a father's love. The prodigal was not yet brought to thorough humbleness—to feel it must be grace or nothing. But the father does not even give him time to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants!" He lets him tell out the confession of his sin, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," but no more; for he is on his neck kissing him. How could he say, "Make me a hired servant," when his father is on his neck, producing the consciousness that he was a son?

The prodigal's judgment about the father must now be drawn from what the father actually is to him, and not from any abstract reasonings about it. The one was a father, if the other was not a son. And that is the true way of receiving the gospel of the grace of God. It is not the working of my mind as to what I am before God, but the revelation by the Holy Ghost of what the Father is to me; and if He is a Father, I am a son. I dwell on this, because I know there are so many souls who have not, as it were, received the spirit of adoption fully; neither knowing what they are as sons in the house of the Father, nor finding their rest in the love of the Father.

See again the manner of the reception of the prodigal here. He determined in his own mind now renewed what he would do, what he would say, and the conditions of his reception: he says, "I will arise," etc. But before he has time to reach the father's house and say all this, "while he was yet a great way off," we read, the father saw him, and had compassion on him. The son's path is now lost in the father's love: the father runs to meet

him, falls on his neck and kisses him. There is nothing in the son but confession of unworthiness. Once received, we are left, as it were, to discover what were his thoughts and feelings by the knowledge of the father's. And so entirely is it in the estimate of our salvation: we are left to discover what we are in the revelation of the love of the Father. The father is on his neck, while all the rags of the far country are upon him. Was it for anything in the son? No; it was because of the love that was in his own heart. The father does not stop to ask him anything: he knows he has acted very wrongly, it would have been no use to say, You have disgraced me, dishonoured my name; he could see that very well. It was no question of fitness or worthiness in the son: the father's heart did not reason in that way; he was acting from himself and for himself—worthily as a father. He was on his neck, because the father loves to be there. It is the love that is in God, not any loveliness in the sinner, that accounts for the extravagant liberality of his reception in Christ.

It is the knowledge of the Father's love that makes me feel what I am. But if I know my sins are forgiven, and the Father is on my neck kissing me, then the more I know of my sins, while I know the Father's love, the happier I am; Luke 7:47. Suppose a merchant having liabilities which he knows himself unable to meet; he would be afraid to look fairly through his books: but suppose on the other hand the debt was discharged, and that he had the certainty of an immense fund of riches after all was paid—if some friend had done it all—he would no longer be afraid to look at them. The discovery of the extent of his obligation would only serve to enhance the sense of his friend's love. If, instead of £1,000, he found his debt had been £10,000, he would

say, Why, this is better than I thought; and if, on looking further, he found the amount £100,000—Well, there never was a friend like this friend of mine! Grace has put all away; therefore the whole effect of the discovery of sin, when we know forgiveness, is but to enhance the love and heighten the joy. If the Father is kissing me, the very consciousness that He is doing it while I am in my rags, proves what a forgiveness it is. There is not another in the whole world who would not have thought of my rags, before he was on my neck.

But he does another thing. The servants are called now to introduce him into the house fittingly. “But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it,” etc. God shews His love towards us as wretched sinners, but then clothes us with Christ. He brings us into the house where the servants are, with nothing less than all the honour He can put upon us. His love welcomes us while in our rags, but here the same love acts in another way. He introduces us into the house as He would have us be there, with His mind expressed about the value of a son. We read here the description of the robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf, and the feast of joy that welcomes the returning prodigal. The father’s mind was, that a son of his was worth it all; and that it was worthy of him to give it. How little worthy would it have been of a father, acting in grace, to keep him as a servant in the house!

There are, perhaps, some who would think it humility to desire the servant’s place in the house. But it is not so; it is only ignorance of the Father’s mind. I read, “that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ

Jesus." Now if you begin at that end—the Father's mind and grace—would it have been worthy of Him to have put us in the house with a constant memorial of our sin and shame—of our former dishonour and degradation? If there was any sense of shame, the merest trace of the far country, would it have been worthy of the father? No! "The worshipper once purged has no more conscience of sins." The condition that finds its place in God's house must be worthy of God.

Take another case. Perhaps our wretched unbelieving hearts may say, Ah, that will be quite true when there—when really in the Father's house. Let me ask what faith is. Faith judges as God judges. I see sin in the light of God's holiness. I judge it most truly when I see its opposition to Him, and the dishonour it puts on Him. I learn grace, too, in the heart of my Father. He that believes sets to his seal that God is true. Faith is the only thing that gives certainty; reasoning does not. Reasoning may be all quite well for the things of this world; but if God speaks about anything, faith believes; faith sets to its seal, not that it may be perhaps, but "that God is true." Now having this, I am as sure that it is true, as if I were now in heaven.

"Abraham believed God," not in God (though that is also true), but God: he believed that what God said was true. And this is what we ought to do: the first point is to believe God. What then does He tell me if I am a believer in His Son? That my sins and iniquities are remembered no more, and I believe it; that I have eternal life, I believe that too; it were sin to doubt it. If I do not believe what He assures me of, I wrong God. It is a sin not to believe myself a son— that I am in God's presence without a spot of sin, through the blood of the

Lamb. Faith believes this: God has said it. If it were only my own righteousness, it must be torn to shreds; but it is the blood of the Lamb: and what has that done? — cleansed half my sins? The question is, What is God's estimate of the value of the blood of Jesus? do you think that God limits the efficacy of His blood? No! He says, it cleanses from all sin. If we go on to see further, it is— who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree. Is it some of my sins? It is my sins. If my soul knows on the one hand the value to God of the blood of the Lamb, I know on the other hand that it all results from the love of the Father. It would be an evil thing to doubt this love, as it would have been an evil thing in the prodigal, when the father was kissing him, to say, I have the rags of the far country upon me. Did he then think of his rags as a reason why there should not be that expression of the love which was in the heart of his father? Thus when I see here the character Christ gives of what God is towards me as a sinner (and He was forced to do this by the self-righteousness of the Pharisees—of man), the doubts of my heart are silenced before such grace.

Is there one who would say, that divine grace sanctions sin? Let him read his judgment in the spirit of the elder brother here. Yet let even such an one see how grace speaks to him. "Therefore came his father out, and entreated him." We see the patience of love towards this wretched man—not merely a poor prodigal—but this wretched one who shared not in the general joy. The servants were glad; they say, "Thy brother is come, and thy father has killed for him the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." All catch the tone of joy but one; and who was he? The man who thought of

self and self-righteousness: “therefore came his father out and entreated him.”

Take care of that, lest your hearts be turning to sourness the love and grace that God shews to a fellow sinner. “He would not go in.” The father reasons with him— “it was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this [not my son, but] thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found.” Love is high enough up for anything; but in vain, he could not enter into the spirit that actuated all in the house, from the father down to the lowest menial. He remained without, and had none of the happiness and none of the joy; there was in him manifested opposition of heart to the riches of the father’s grace; and this is man.

Do you know God thus? You would know yourselves too. Be it so; it is indeed well; but do not call God’s heart in question because of that. How can I know God’s heart? Is it by looking into my own heart? No; but by learning it in the gift of His Son. The God we have to do with is the God who has given His Son for sinners; and if we do not know this, we do not know Him at all. “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? “(Rom. 8:32.) Do not be saying to God, Make me as one of thy hired servants. All true service must result from the knowledge of Himself. Do not be putting the estimate of your own hearts on God’s goodness. Our hearts have such a tendency to turn back to legalism, and think it humility. The only real humbleness and strength and blessing is to forget self in the presence and blessedness of God. We may be brought thither by a humbling process; but it is not in thinking evil of self merely, that we are truly humble: we have the privilege

of forgetting ourselves in the manifestation of the love of God and our Father, who is love to us.

The Lord grant you, through Jesus, to know, as poor sinners, God thus revealed in love.

“No More Conscience Of Sins”

Hebrews 10

The object of redemption is to bring us nigh to God, as it is written, “Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” But what is our state before God when thus brought nigh? The right understanding of this is most important. It is impossible that we could be happy even in the presence of God, if there still existed a thought of His being against us. I need the perfect settled assurance that there is no sin upon me before Him. The sense of responsibility ever makes a person unhappy when there is any question as to sin standing against him: see the case of a servant and his master, or that of a child and its parent—the conscience is miserable if there be upon it the sense of that which will be judged. So God’s presence must be indeed terrible, unless the conscience be perfectly good. If there be happiness for me there, it can only be in the sense of His favour, and of the completeness with which we have been brought back—the perfect assurance of “the worshipper once purged” having “no more conscience of sins.”

God speaks to us according to His estimate of our standing: it may not be our heart’s experience. There is a distinctness between the operation of the Spirit of God in bringing me unto Jesus, bearing witness to me of God’s love, and of the efficacy of what Christ has done, and His operation in my soul in producing in me the love of God. That which is the subject of experience is what is produced in my own soul, whereas that which gives me peace is His testimony to the work of Jesus. A Christian

who doubts the Father's love to him, and who looks for peace to that which passes in his own heart, is doubting God's truth. The gospel is the revelation God has given of Himself; it displays the love of God towards us, and what is in His heart. I can trust the declaration of what is in God's heart, and not what I think of myself.

The apostle speaks of a due time: "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." It is almost always true that there is in us a terrible process of breaking the heart, in order that we may be brought to the ascertainment that we are lost and ruined sinners; but the gospel begins at the close of God's experience of man's heart, and calls us from that in order that we should have joy and peace from the experience of what is in His heart. Man left alone before the flood, put under the law, in Canaan, indeed under all and every trial of his nature and tendency up to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, was just God's putting him to the test.

One would have thought, after Adam had been turned out of paradise for transgression, that would have been a sufficient warning; but his first-born became a murderer. We should have supposed that the flood which swept off the workers of iniquity would have repressed, for a time at least, by the terror of judgment, the outbreak of sin; but we find immediately afterwards Noah getting drunk, and Ham dishonouring his father. The devouring fire of Sinai, which made even Moses fear and quake, seemed sufficient to subdue the rebel heart and make it bow beneath God's hand; but the golden calf was the awful evidence that the heart of man was "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Again in Canaan a part of the world was tried to the

utmost to be cultivated, but it would not do. A bad tree producing bad fruit was the only type by which God could set Israel forth. See Isaiah 5. He might dig about it and dung it, but after all these efforts it could only bring forth more bad fruit. At last He said, “I have yet one son, perhaps they will reverence my son,” but man preferred having the world for himself, and so crucified Jesus. Looking to His cross, Christ said, “Now is the judgment of this world,” John 12.

At the crucifixion of Jesus, the veil was rent, and the holiest opened; what God was within the veil then shone out in all its fulness. When grace reveals this to me, I get confidence. I see God holy and expecting holiness—true; but the peace of God is in knowing what He is to us, and not what we are to Him. He knows all the evil of our hearts. Nothing can be worse than the rejection of Jesus —man’s hatred is shewn out there, and God’s love to the full. The wretched soldier (who, in the cowardly impotence of the consciousness that he could with impunity insult the meek and lowly Jesus, pierced His side with a spear), let out, in that disgraceful act, the blood and the water, which was able to cleanse even such as he. Here God’s heart was revealed, what He is to the sinner; and this is our salvation.

Death and judgment teach me redemption. God judged sin indeed in sacrificing His well-beloved Son to put it away. It must be punished: Jesus bore the blow—this rent the veil, and shewed out what God really is. The very blow that let out the holiness of God put away the sin which His holiness judged. The perfect certainty of God’s love and the perfect cleansing of the conscience is that which the defiled and trembling sinner needs. “By the grace of God” Jesus Christ has “tasted death.”

Death, the wages of sin, is seen in the cross of Jesus as the consequence of “the grace of God.” “Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness.” Were anyone to demand of me a proof of God’s love, I could not give more than God has done in that “He spared not his own Son”: none other could be so great. But then, it might be asked, may not my sin affect it? No, God knew all your sin, and He has provided for it all: “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

In real communion the conscience must be purged; there can be no communion if the soul be not at peace. We read here, “By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” There is very frequently the confounding of what faith produces with what faith rests upon. Faith always rests upon God’s estimate of the blood of Jesus as He has revealed it in His word: faith rests on no experience. Jesus said, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!”— “by the which will we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” “We are sanctified,” it is not that which is proposed for our attainment; it was the good will of God to do it, and the work is done, to bring our souls back unto Himself. Jesus has said “it is finished.” But then there must be the knowledge of this also, in order for us to begin to act. You might have a person willing to pay your debts; nay, you might even have them paid; but if you did not know it, you would be just as miserable as before. We are not called upon to believe in a promise that Jesus should come to die and rise again. The work is done. He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” “when he had by himself purged our sins.” But then this is not sufficient for me: I must know that the

work is done; and therefore He sent down the Holy Ghost to be the witness that God is satisfied.

Knowing perfectly their guilt and amount, God has declared, “your sins and iniquities I will remember no more.” Faith rests on this, “God is true”: “he that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.” The Lord said to Israel in Egypt concerning the blood of the paschal lamb, “When I see the blood, I will pass over.” Could there be hesitation if we were in a house marked with the blood on the door-post? Should we not know that He would pass over? Faith is always divine certainty. God has said, “I will remember no more.” This is the ground on which we enter into the holiest. “The worshipper once purged” has “no more conscience of sins.”

God has found His rest in Jesus: our peace and joy depend upon knowing this. Were anything more necessary, it could not be His rest: God is not seeking for something else when at rest. None else could have afforded this. “God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.” “They are all gone out of the way”: “there was none righteous; no, not one.” But God bore witness unto Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” God is well pleased in Christ; God rests in His Son, not merely in His life, though that was holy and acceptable unto Him, but in His work on the cross. Jesus said, “except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit,” and that meets our need. When He shews His glory to the angels, He points to what has been done by man. In man was God glorified; as in man, the first Adam, He had been

dishonoured. Christ reversed all this: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him”; which God recognises in straightway glorifying Him. Righteousness cannot be looked for from the creature, but the fruit of righteousness will—the thing itself is only in Christ.

God is not a grudging giver. Did Satan, tempting Eve, question this in the forbidden fruit? He has given His Son; He rests in Him; the sinner likewise rests there. What can man do for me? Nothing. If I were to come to him to deliver me from death, could he help me? No. He might fill my hand with those perishing things which could only swell the triumph of death and decorate the tomb, but there his power ends.

In Jesus God has found His rest—this is mine also; I know it from the testimony of God’s truth. Have you found rest in God’s rest? If you say, I have not, will you say that God has not found His rest there? Will you look to your own heart? In that you can never find it—it is only in Jesus: who had said, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.” Would that all knew the perfect rest to be found there!

Growth Through The Truth

1 Peter 2:1-6

In one sense, as here taught us by the Spirit of God through the apostle, the healthful position of the saint is ever that of the “new-born babe”; whilst in another sense we are, of course, to be making progress so as to become young men and fathers in Christ. As to practical position of soul in receiving truth from God, it is that of the new-born babe: “as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” This is the place in which, as believers, we are set by the Spirit, in order that we may grow up into Christ.

But if we are to grow by the sincere milk of the word, it is not by the exercise of our minds upon the word, nor yet even by great study of it merely; we need the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and in order to this, there must be the exercising of ourselves unto godliness—the “laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,” so that the Holy Spirit be not grieved. Has the Christian envy, guile, hypocrisies, allowed to work in his heart? There can be no growth in the true knowledge of the things of God. Therefore he is called upon to be ever a “new-born babe,” coming to receive, in the consciousness of his own weakness, littleness, and ignorance, and in simplicity of heart, food from the word of God.

The Lord always keeps His simple dependent ones thus. “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” But then the knowledge of God always humbles; the more we know of Him, the more shall we know of our own emptiness. “If

any man think he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Just as the babe is constantly receiving nourishment from the mother, so need we to be constantly receiving spiritual nourishment from the word of God. When the word is received by us in faith, we become strengthened; we grow thereby in the knowledge of God, and of His grace. The apostle Paul, having heard of the faith of the Ephesians in the Lord Jesus, prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," would "give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," etc. Having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," we come to His word and receive from Him that which we need to comfort, nourish, and refresh our souls. The word always comes with savour from Himself; it is known as "the word of his grace." I may study the word again and again; but unless I get into communion with Him by it, it will profit me nothing—at least at the time.

God reveals not His things "to the wise and prudent," but unto "babes." It is not the strength of man's mind judging about "the things of God," that gets the blessing from Him; it is the spirit of the babe desiring "the sincere milk of the word." He says, "open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The strongest mind must come to the word of God as the new-born babe.

And so too in speaking of God's truth; whenever we cannot "speak as the oracles of God," through the power of communion, it is our business to be silent. We should be cautious not to trifle with unascertained truth. Nothing hinders growth more than this—trifling with

unascertained truth: we then act as masters and not as learners. Our position as regards the truth of God must be ever that of new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby.

But there is nothing so hard for our hearts as to be humble— nothing so easy for them as to get out of this place of lowliness. It is not by precepts merely that we are either brought into this state, or preserved there; it is by tasting "that the Lord is gracious." It is quite true that God is a God of judgment— that He will exercise vengeance on His enemies; but this is not the way in which He stands towards the Christian. He is made known unto us as "the God of all grace"; and the position in which we are set is that of tasting that He is gracious.

How hard it is for us to believe this, that the Lord is gracious! The natural feeling of our hearts is, "I know that thou art an austere man." Are our wills thwarted? we quarrel with God's ways, and are angry because we cannot have our own. It may be perhaps that this feeling is not manifested; but still at any rate there is the want in all of us naturally of the understanding of the grace of God, the inability to apprehend it. See the case of the poor prodigal in the gospel: the thought of his father's grace never once entered into his mind when he set out on his return, and therefore he only reckoned on being received as a "hired servant." But what does the father say? What are the feelings of his heart? "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it … for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." This is grace, free grace.

So too in the case of the woman of Samaria (the poor adulteress, ignorant of the character of Him who spake with her, “the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” and therefore the suited one to meet her need): the Lord says to her, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” Hadst thou only understood what grace is, thou wouldst have asked, and I would have given!

It is not only when there is open rebellion against God, and utter carelessness and unconcern about salvation, that there is this darkness of understanding as to grace. Our natural heart has got so far away from God, that it will look to anything in the world—to the devil even—to get happiness; anywhere but to the grace of God. Our consciences, when at all awakened to a sense of sin, and of its hatefulness in the sight of God, think that He cannot be gracious. Adam, had he known the grace of God, when he found himself naked, would at once have gone to God to cover him. But no, he was ignorant of it; he saw his state, and he sought to hide himself from God amongst the trees of the garden. And so it is with us. The consciousness of being naked before God, apart from the understanding of His grace, makes us flee from Him.

Nay, further, as believers in Jesus, when our consciences come to be exercised, and we feel that we must have to do with God in everything, we may not have the distinct sense of the Lord’s being gracious; and there will then be not only a deep sense of our responsibility but at the same time the thought that we have to answer to God’s requirements, and shall be judged of Him according to

the way in which we do so. There is a measure of truth in this: the requirements of God must be met; but then the wrongness is in thinking that, if we do not find in ourselves what will please God, He will condemn us because of it.

On the other hand there is sometimes the thought that grace implies God's passing by sin. But no, quite the contrary; grace supposes sin to be so horribly bad a thing that God cannot tolerate it. Were it in the power of man, after being unrighteous and evil, to patch up his ways, and mend himself so as to stand before God, there would then be no need of grace. The very fact of the Lord's being gracious shews sin to be so evil a thing, that, man being a sinner, his state is utterly ruined and hopeless, and nothing but free grace will do for him—can meet his need.

A man may see sin to be a deadly thing, and he may see that nothing that defiles can enter into the presence of God: his conscience may be brought to a true conviction of sin; yet this is not tasting "that the Lord is gracious." It is a very good thing to be brought even to that, for I am then tasting that the Lord is righteous, and it is needful for me to know it; but then I must not stop there: sin without grace would put me in a hopeless state. Peter had not "tasted that the Lord was gracious" when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! "and therefore he thought that his sin unfitted him for the presence of the Lord.

Such too was the thought of Simon the leper, respecting the poor woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Ah, if this man had been a prophet (if he had known the mind

of God), he would have sent away this woman out of his presence, “for she is a sinner.” And why? Because he did not know that the Lord was gracious. He had a certain sense of the righteousness of God, but not the knowledge of His grace. I cannot say that God ought to be gracious; but I can say (if ignorant of His grace), that He ought to cast me, as a sinner, away from His presence, because He is righteous. Thus we see that we must learn what God is to us, not by our own thoughts, but by what He has revealed Himself to be, and that is “the God of all grace.”

The moment I understand (as Peter did) that I am a sinful man, and yet that it was because the Lord knew the full extent of my sin, and what its hatefulness was, that He came to me, I understand what grace is. Faith makes me see that God is greater than my sin, and not that my sin is greater than God. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” As soon as I believe Jesus to be the Son of God, I see that God has come to me because I was a sinner and could not go to Him.

Man’s ability to meet the requirements of the holiness of God has been fully tried: but the plainer the light came, the more did it shew to man his darkness; and the stricter the rule, the more did it bring out his self-will. And then it was, “when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” — “when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” This is grace. God, seeing the blood of His Son, is satisfied with it; and if I am satisfied with it, this is what glorifies God.

But the Lord that I have known as laying down His life for me is the same Lord that I have to do with every day

of my life; and all His dealings with me are on this same principle of grace. Do I want to learn what His love is? it is taught in the cross; but He gave Himself for me in order that all the fulness and joy that is in Him might be mine. I must be a learner of it still—a new born babe desiring "the sincere milk of the word that I may grow thereby."

The great secret of growth is the looking up to the Lord as gracious. How precious, how strengthening it is, to know that Jesus is at this moment feeling and exercising the same love towards me as when He died upon the cross for me! This is a truth that should be used by us in the most common everyday circumstances of fife. Suppose, for instance, I find an evil temper in myself, which I feel it difficult to overcome: let me bring it to Jesus as my friend, virtue goes out of Him for my need. Faith should be ever thus in exercise against temptation, and not simply my own effort; my own effort against it will never be sufficient. The source of real strength is in the sense of the Lord's being gracious.

But the natural man in us always disallows Christ as the only source of strength and of every blessing. Suppose my soul is out of communion, the natural heart says, I must correct the cause of this before I can come to Christ: but He is gracious. And, knowing this, the way is to return to Him at once, just as we are, and then humble ourselves deeply before Him. It is only in Him, and from Him, that we shall find that which will restore our souls. Humbleness in His presence is the only real humbleness. If we own ourselves in His presence to be just what we are, we shall find that He will shew us nothing but grace.

But though “disallowed indeed of men”—of the natural heart in every one of us—who is this that says, “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded”? It is God; He laid this corner stone, not man; and He says, This is what I think of Christ. By learning of God, through His teaching me by the Holy Spirit, I come to have the same thoughts about Jesus that He has. Here I find my strength, my comfort, my joy. That in which God delights and will delight for ever is now my joy also.

God says, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”; “mine elect in whom my soul delighteth”; and, working these (His) thoughts into my soul, I too see Jesus to be precious, and find my delight in Him. Thus He who was crucified for me—who “bare my sins in his own body on the tree” —is precious to God and precious to me. God could find no rest save in Jesus. We may look throughout the world, we shall find nothing which can satisfy our hearts but Jesus. If God looked for truth, for righteousness, all He could desire He found in Jesus; and He found it in Him for us. Here is that which gives comfort to the soul. I see Jesus “now in the presence of God for us”; and God is satisfied, God delights in Him.

It is Christ Himself in whom God rests, and will rest for ever; but then Jesus, having borne and blotted out my sins by His own blood, has united me to Himself in heaven. He descended from above, bringing God down to us here: He has ascended, placing the saints in union with Himself there. If God finds Jesus precious, He finds me (in Him) precious also.

Jesus, as Man, has glorified God on the earth: God rests in that; as Man, having accomplished redemption, He

“has passed into the heavens,” “now to appear in the presence of God for us.” It is Jesus who gives abiding rest to our souls, and not what our thoughts about ourselves may be. Faith never thinks about that which is in ourselves as its ground of rest; it receives, loves, and apprehends what God has revealed, and what are God’s thoughts about Jesus, in whom is His rest.

It is not by human knowledge or intellect that we attain to this. The poor ignorant sinner, when enlightened by the Spirit, can understand how precious Jesus is to the heart of God, as well as the most intellectual. The dying robber could give a better account of the whole life of Jesus than all around him, saying, “This man has done nothing amiss “; he was taught by the Spirit.

Are we much in communion with God, our faces will shine, and others will discover it though we may not be conscious of it ourselves. Moses, when he had been talking with God, wist not that the skin of his face shone; he forgot himself, he was absorbed in God. As knowing Jesus to be precious to our souls, our eyes and our hearts being occupied with Him, they will be effectually prevented from being taken up with the vanity and sin around; and this too will be our strength against the sin and corruption of our own hearts. Whatever I see in myself that is not in Him is sin; but then it is not thinking upon my own sins, and my own vileness, and being occupied with them, that will humble me; but thinking of the Lord Jesus, dwelling upon the excellence in Him. It is well to have done with ourselves and to be taken up with Jesus. We are entitled to forget ourselves, we are entitled to forget our sins, we are entitled to forget all but Jesus. It is by looking to Jesus that we can give up anything, that we can walk as obedient children:

His love constrains us. Were it simply a command, we should have no power to obey.

The Lord give us thus to be learners of the fulness of grace which is in Jesus, the beloved and elect One of God, so that “we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

May we, beloved, in searching into the truth of God, having “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” ever be found as new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby.

Why Do I Groan?

Romans 7 and 8

There is nothing so hard for our hearts as to abide in the sense of grace, to continue practically conscious that "we are not under law, but under grace." It is by grace that the heart is "established"; but then there is nothing more difficult for us really to comprehend than the fulness of grace— that "grace of God wherein we stand," and to walk in the power and consciousness of it.

It is only in the presence of God that we can know it, and there it is our privilege to be. The moment we get away from the presence of God, there will always be certain workings of our own thoughts within us; and our own thoughts can never reach up to the thoughts of God about us, to the "grace of God."

It is quite impossible for us to draw any right conclusion about grace, until we are settled on the great foundation of grace—God's gift of Jesus. No reasoning of our own hearts could ever reach up to "the grace of God," for the very simple reason, that in order to be such it must flow directly and freely from God. What I had any, the smallest possible, right to expect, could not be pure, free grace—could not be this "grace of God."

But then, even after we have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," it is quite natural for our own thoughts to work as soon as we leave the presence of God; and the moment they do so, whether it be about our sins, or about our graces, or anything else that we are occupied with, we lose the sense of grace, and can no longer reckon upon it.

This getting out of God's presence is the source of all our weakness as saints, for in God's strength we can do anything: "if God be for us, who can be against us?" The consciousness of His realised presence with us makes us "more than conquerors." Whether our thoughts be about ourselves, or about circumstances around us, everything then becomes easy. But it is alone, when in communion with Him, that we are able thus to measure everything according to grace.

Are our thoughts about ourselves? When in the presence of God we rest on His grace, nothing can trouble us. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" "Who is he that condemneth?" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" But the moment that we get out of God's presence, we cannot any longer rest on His grace as when in communion with Him.

Again, are they respecting the condition of things around? He may have sorrow of spirit on this account, as conscious of the evil, misery, and ruin in which everything is (as Jesus, He "groaned in spirit, and was troubled"). But it is impossible, when we are abiding in the sense of God's presence, for anything, be it what it may, even the state of the church, to shake us; for we count on God, and then all things become but a sphere and scene for the operation of His grace.

Nature never counts upon God's grace; it may count upon God's mercy in passing by sin, but only because it imagines either that He is indifferent about it (attributing to Him its own low estimate of sin), or that He has no right to judge it. Grace, when understood by the soul, is seen to be the very opposite of this—to be founded on a just sense of the tremendous evil of sin, on

the part of God. And when we have learnt in our measure to take God's estimate of sin, we are filled with amazement at that grace of God which can blot it all out —which has given His own Son to die because of it. What the natural man understands by mercy is not this —God's blotting out sin by the bloodshedding of Jesus, but His passing by sin with indifference. This is not grace.

When the conscience becomes awakened, and there are thoughts of responsibility, without the apprehension of grace, the first thing it seeks to do is to put itself under the law; it cannot do otherwise. And the natural man even often does this; he knows of no other way of pleasing God than obedience to the law; and this, being ignorant both of God and himself, he thinks he can render.

But the having very simple thoughts of grace is the true source of our strength as Christians; and the abiding in the sense of grace in the presence of God is all the secret of holiness, peace, and quietness of spirit. There are two things which may hinder our peace of spirit, and which, being frequently confounded and mixed up together, create a difficulty in the minds of the saints: Firstly, a troubled state of conscience respecting acceptance and salvation; Secondly, a groaning of spirit, similar to that mentioned by Paul in Romans 8:23, because of circumstances around which distress and try us. But these are quite distinct. The trouble and exercise of spirit which the saint may and indeed will have, whilst living in this world, because of circumstances around, is altogether an opposite thing to that trouble of conscience which is respecting pardon of sin.

Where there is that trouble of conscience, love is not in exercise, but self is the centre. But when the trouble is because of the state of things around us, the contrary is the case. How deep the trouble of soul of the Lord Jesus! but it flowed from love and from a perfect sense of what the grace of God was. When grace is fully, that is, simply known— when we are resting upon God as being for us, and know that He is love, there can be no mistake between these two causes of disquiet; but if we do not understand what grace is, we shall be apt immediately to confound them.

If there be in us any anxiety of conscience as to our acceptance, we may be quite sure that we are not thoroughly established in grace. It is true there may be the sense of sin in one who is established, but this is a very different thing from distress of conscience as to acceptance. Want of peace may be caused by either of two things; my never having been fully brought to trust in grace, or my having through carelessness lost the sense of grace, which is easily done. The grace of God is so unlimited, so full, so perfect, that, if we get for a moment out of the presence of God, we cannot have the true consciousness of it—we have no strength to apprehend it; and if we attempt to know it out of His presence, we shall only turn it to licentiousness.

If we look at the simple fact of what grace is, it has no limit, no bounds. Be we what we may (and we cannot be worse than we are), in spite of all that, what God is towards us is love\ Neither our joy nor our peace is dependent on what we are to God, but on what He is to us, and this is grace.

Grace supposes all the sin and evil that is in us, and is the blessed revelation that through Jesus all this sin and evil have been put away. A single sin is more horrible to God than a thousand sins—nay, than all the sins in the world—are to us; and yet, with the fullest consciousness of what we are, all that God is pleased to be towards us is love! It is vain to look to any extent of evil: a person may be (speaking after the manner of man) a great sinner, or a little sinner; but this is not the question at all: grace has reference to what God is, and not to what we are, except indeed that the very greatness of our sins does but magnify the extent of the grace of God. At the same time, we must remember that the object and necessary effect of grace is to bring our souls into communion with God, to sanctify us, by bringing the soul to know God and to love Him. Therefore the knowledge of grace is the true source of sanctification.

If grace then be what God is toward me, and has nothing at all to do with what I am, the moment I begin to think about myself as though God would judge me because of my sins, it is evident that I am not then consciously standing in grace. The heart naturally has these thoughts; and indeed it is also one of the effects of being awakened, for the conscience then begins directly to reason about what God thinks of it; but this is not grace. The soul that turns back upon itself to learn God's judgment about it, and what His dealings with it are likely to be, is not leaning upon what God is—is not standing in grace.

I have said that there are two things which, though quite distinct, are nevertheless frequently confounded in the minds of the saints—a bad conscience, and the groaning of the spiritual man because of evil around. The moment

we get a little away from the sense of grace, we shall be in danger of confusing these together. Suppose for instance that I, as a saint, am sensible of the terrible weight of evil which is all around me, and groan about it, soon (unless it be guarded against) this will mix itself up with trouble of conscience; I shall lose the sense of God's love and put myself under law. But a saint may "groan" thus without at all losing the consciousness of love, nay, for the very reason that he has it.

When the Lord Jesus "groaned in himself" and wept at the grave of Lazarus, His deep sense of the sorrow which sin had brought into the world did not affect that of His Father's love. We find Him using at the same time the language of the fullest confidence in that love— "Father, I know that thou hearest me always." And so a Christian may be sorrowful, but should not on that account feel as though God were not love, or lose the sense of His grace. Love to others combined with a spiritual perception of evil will cause us very much sorrow. Jesus felt this infinitely more than we can ever do, because the power of love in His heart made Him so-much more deeply sensible of the dreadful weight of evil which was pressing on the hearts of others. He felt the miseries around Him in proportion as He knew the blessedness and love of the Father's presence.

We have "suffering," "groaning," etc., spoken of in Romans 8. Paul groaned within himself from the consciousness of infirmity, from distress, trials, etc.; but this raised no question in his mind about the certainty of God's grace— quite the contrary. The more conscious we are that the Spirit dwells in us, the more we shall "groan." The more certain we are of blessing, the more we realise grace; the more we know of God's love, and

the effects of that love, the more shall we “groan” at all that is at present around us; but not as though these things brought the smallest cloud over divine favour.

Paul is spoken of as groaning in spirit, and why? He realised the result of the grace in which he stood. Through the power of faith being made conscious of the blessings which are his, he groans within himself after them; but never as if there were the slightest doubt respecting his salvation. Delivered he is from all uncertainty as to the fulness, the freeness, of divine favour towards him; and in the consciousness of this he groans within himself, “waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

The end of chapter 7 describes quite another sort of groaning, though, as before remarked, the two are often confounded together; because, as sin is still dwelling in us (in our flesh), those who are not really established in grace do not discern the difference between them. The whole chapter is full of what people call experience; not of that which is (properly speaking) Christian experience, but of the thoughts of the mind within and about itself. The state described is that of a person, quickened indeed, but whose whole set of reasonings centres in himself. I could not venture to say how many times he says “I,” and “me”: the whole chapter is full of it.

Observe the difference of expression in verse 14: “We know that the law is spiritual”; all Christians know that; but then does he say, We know that we are carnal, sold under sin? No, “I am carnal, sold under sin.” He turns back immediately to self and to the judgment, which, being quickened, he had formed of himself by his own

experience, as under the law, and begins to reason about what he is before God, and not about what God is towards him; and the consequence is that he exclaims, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” So it is with us; directly we begin to reason about ourselves, we can only say, “O wretched man that I am!” what shall I do? I hate sin, I wish to please God, I confess that the law is good; but the more that I see it is so, the worse it is for me— the more miserable I am!

Is there a word of grace in all this? No, not a word. When he brings in Christ at the close, then he is able to thank God: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This chapter is full of a great deal of truth, in the experience of the individual mentioned; but it is truth stopping short of grace, of the simple fact that, whatever be his state, let him be as bad as he may, “God is love,” and only love towards him. Instead of looking at God, it is all “I,” “I,” “I.” In verse 15, six times over does he speak of himself, his own thoughts; and though some of these were spiritual, yet it is, “What I hate, that do I,” “When I would do good, evil is present with me!”

All this may be very profitable experience to bring us to the conviction of our utter hopelessness in ourselves. Still let us put it in its right place, and remember that it is not, properly speaking, Christian experience; but that it only describes the feelings of a soul that has not yet fully and experimentally known the simple fact, that “when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”; or else that of one who, through the workings of the flesh, has slipped back to looking at himself, and at what he is, instead of looking at God—at grace:

Faith produces many effects in our hearts always suitable to the object at which it looks. If for instance faith looks at the law, it sees its spirituality far more clearly than nature can; and then, seeing the flesh too in its real vileness, if it looks no farther, but judges of itself according to this spirituality of the law, the effect must be to bring us under condemnation of it (I mean of course as to our feeling)—under the consciousness of guilt and weakness. We shall hate, and seek to separate from evil; but that will be all; it will leave us crying out, "O wretched man that I am!" With increased light there will only be increased misery.

But if faith looks at God as He has revealed Himself in grace, it judges accordingly. It never then reasons upon the fruit produced, it rests in the revelation God has given of Himself—grace. The fruits of grace are to be looked for of course; for if there be life in us, the "fruit of the Spirit" will be manifested. The saint, for instance, knows that "peace" has been "made through the blood of the cross." The effect is, that love flows forth. He feels that he is called unto blessing, and therefore has his feet "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"; drinking into his own soul the love of God, he becomes as a river of love flowing forth to others; John 7:38. But though these fruits are produced, faith never reasons on its own fruits; it can alone rest in the revelation God has given of Himself as "the God of all grace." This is its own and only proper sphere.

The natural heart ever reasons about itself, and in a Christian it is always judging by fruits. This must necessarily bring disquiet, instead of peace. In itself it can see nothing but sin; and as to any fruit I have even been enabled to bear, this is so mixed with imperfection

that it can only a be subject for judgment (though it be the Father's judgment)—it cannot give me peace. That can only be found in what Jesus has wrought, in "the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

What then is the position in chapter 7? First of all the apostle establishes the great principle that the believer is "dead to the law." Then he describes the workings of a quickened soul, which, knowing that the "law is spiritual," still feels "under the law," and is therefore compelled to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Whom is he thinking of in all this? Himself. Now, dear friends, let me ask you, Am I, or is my state the object of faith? No, surely not! Faith never makes what is in my heart its object, but God's revelation of Himself in grace. If we stop half way, and see nothing but the law, it will just discover to us our condemnation, and prove us to be "without strength." If God allows us to know enough of the law and of the experience described in this chapter to shew us what is our true state, that is just where grace meets us.

It is not that the conflict here spoken of will not continue: grace could not be known at all where conflict is not known; the unconverted only are without it. But that which will not continue when grace is fully known is that bitterness of spirit in which, while the conflict is going on, the person judges himself, seeing the law to be "spiritual," but himself "carnal, sold under sin." The love of God is not realised as his own, and therefore this causes him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am!"

It is quite clear that, while there is this experience felt, there is not simple faith in God's grace; there is not a

clear view of what God is towards me in Christ; for when the soul apprehends that, when the faculties of the new man are exercised on their proper object, there is perfect rest. And though there is still conflict, yet the soul is at peace: “the battle is not ours, but the Lord’s.”

But how am I to know what is God’s mind towards me? Is it by judging of it from what I find in myself? Surely not! Supposing that I even found good in myself, if I expected God to look at me on that account, would it be grace? There may be a measure of truth in this kind of reasoning; for, if there be life in my soul, fruit will be apparent; but this is not to give me peace any more than the evil that is in me is to hinder my having peace. That too is true reasoning where the apostle says, “the law is spiritual, but I am carnal”; “O wretched man that I am!” but there is nothing of grace in it.

But does the certainty of grace take us out of all trouble? No; I am not at all denying the fact that there is, and while we are in a sinful body that there ever must be, conflict going on between the flesh and the Spirit. But then to have this conflict going on in the conscious certainty that God is for me, because I am “under grace,” is a very different thing from having it in the fear that He is against me, because I am “under law.”

If in evil I see myself (and this I always shall whilst here, in the root, even if it be not manifested in its fruit), and if I think that God will be against me because of it, I shall have no strength for conflict, but be utterly cast down, groaning as to my acceptance. But if certain that God is for me, the consciousness of this will give me courage and victory, nay, even enable me to say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my

thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." In the confidence of the love and grace of God I can ask Him to search out all my evil—what I otherwise dare not do, lest it should overwhelm me with despair. God is my friend—for me, against my own evil.

The apostle speaks (chap. 8) of the "carnal mind" being "enmity against God"; but then God in the gift of Jesus has brought out this blessed truth, that when man was at enmity against God, God was love towards man: our enmity was met by His love. The triumph of grace was seen in this, that when man's enmity had cast out Jesus from the earth, God's love brought in salvation by that very act—came in to atone for the sin of those who had rejected Him. In the view of the fullest development of man's sin faith sees the fullest manifestation of God's grace. Where does faith see the greatest depth of man's sin and hatred of God? In the cross; and at the same glance it sees the greatest extent of God's triumphant love and mercy to man. The spear of the centurion which pierced the side of Jesus only brought out that which spoke of love and mercy.

The apostle then goes on to shew that those once at enmity with God are now become His heirs; and that the knowledge of this is founded on the knowledge of grace: "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again," etc. Grace first makes us children of God, and then gives us the knowledge of it, and that we are heirs of God.

But what is the extent of this grace towards us? It has given us the same portion that the Lord Jesus has. "We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." It is not only certain that grace has visited us, has found us when

we were “in our sins,” but it is also certain that it has set us where Christ is; that we are identified with the Lord Jesus in all but His essential glory as God. The soul is placed thus in the consciousness of God’s perfect love, and therefore, as it is said in chapter 5, “we joy in God.”

I have got away from grace if I have the slightest doubt or hesitation about God’s love. I shall then be saying, I am unhappy, because I am not what I should like to be. But, dear friends, this is not the question: the real question is, whether God is what we should like Him to be, whether Jesus is all we could wish. If the consciousness of what we are, of what we find in ourselves, has any other effect than, while it humbles us, to increase our adoration of what God is, we are off the ground of pure grace. The immediate effect of such consciousness should be to make our hearts reach out to God and to His grace as abounding over it all.

But while grace thus gives us perfect peace in our souls, it does not save us from sorrow. Even as the Lord Jesus so perfectly entered into the sorrow and groaning around Him when here, and was therefore a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”; so in his measure ought to saint to take up the sense of the weight of evil that is in the world, and thus become a man of sorrows also. Just as we abide in grace, shall we have in proportion a sense of the weight of evil that is all around, and groan in sympathy with a groaning and travailing creation; and not only so, but being ourselves in the body, we shall “groan” likewise “within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.”

But is there any uncertainty as to our salvation in this groaning? No, quite the contrary; it is the very certainty that “all things are ours” which makes us “groan.” Having the certainty and foretaste of glory everything here is made the more painful by contrast. That which the saint is entitled to is so very different from all that is actually around him, that the more he knows of the joy of dwelling in the presence of God, the larger understanding he has of God’s love and grace; the more he realises the blessedness of his portion in that glory to which he is predestinated, the more will he “groan”!

How different this from the groaning of an uneasy conscience! Let us not mistake, dear friends; let us not confound the two: this groaning of one perfectly free from the sense of condemnation described in chapter 8, and the groaning of conscience, the “O wretched man that I am!” of chapter 7. Carelessness of walk, and through it losing the sense of grace, may indeed expose him who has once consciously stood in the power of redemption to the fiery darts of the wicked one. But this is not, as before remarked, true Christian experience. When the heart is made full with the rich blessings of Christ, it will not turn back to gnaw upon itself.

It is our privilege as saints to know that “there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus”; that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” But we must not stop simply here. There must be the going on to know what we are as sons of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, the Spirit bearing witness to us of it. God “hath established us in Christ,” “hath anointed us,” and “given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” Having thus the fullest knowledge that God has thought about

us in love, and predestinated us to be conformed to the image of Jesus, and to share His glory, understanding what His love is now about in His dealings with us, and not being yet in the glory but still in the body, and in the midst of evil and groaning all around, we shall therefore groan. “Ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” The very reason of our groaning is because of our having the first-fruits of the Spirit, not at all because of a bad conscience; it is the Spirit of Christ groaning in us.

And then this groaning is always accompanied by confidence in God. As with Jesus, when “he groaned in the spirit and was troubled” at the grave of Lazarus, He said, “I know that thou hearest me always”; so is it given to the saint to have the like confidence (see 1 John 5:14, 15). Nor should this confidence even fail, when we “know not what to pray for as we ought,” for it is added, “but we know that all things work together for good,” etc. I may see evil in myself—in another saint—in the church, and seek to pray about it, but yet not have sufficient intelligence to know what would remedy it; the Spirit will help my infirmity, and groan within me. God does not regard my ignorance, but answers according to “the mind of the Spirit,” who always “maketh intercession for the saints according to God.” I ought to be so confident of God’s directing “all things, as to be able to say, I am certain all things work together for good. Is a soul in this state? Come what may—trouble, sorrow, disappointment, grief, whatever it be—all is peace, for it is resting upon God, and not (as in chap. 7) looking at itself.

Our very griefs then flow from the knowledge of God's immense love, and from the consciousness of all that belongs to us in Christ. Jesus fully knew, as none other, what the presence of God, what the enjoyment of His favour, was, and "groaned," because, coming from the presence of God, He found man out of it. The life which I now have identifies me, not with responsibility as "under the law," but with Christ, who has borne the judgment of a broken law for me. Instead of being wretched and miserable because looking at myself as under law, I enjoy the consciousness of redemption, rest in grace, and "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." But the moment we get a glimpse of the glory of Christ as ours, this world becomes to us a scene of misery and bondage.

This groaning on account of evil always associates itself with love. If for instance I see a saint sin, it leads me at once to the love and grace he is sinning against. It is the consciousness of divine favour which I have towards that saint which makes me anxious about him; and while I grieve at his sin, I have joy in God in the midst of my sorrow.

Well, beloved friends, if these things be so, if this be the place in which grace sets us, let me ask, Is it so with you? If God be pure love—nothing else than love to us; if there be no mixed feelings in Him, then if you have not full joy, if there is any hesitation in your souls as to your standing before Him, you cannot be simply resting in His grace.

Is there distrust and distress in your minds? See if it be not because you are still saying "I," "I," and losing sight of God's grace. You may indeed have faith, but you want simplicity of heart in looking at God's grace. It is better

to be thinking of what God is than of what we are. This looking at ourselves is at the bottom really pride—a want of the thorough consciousness that we are good for nothing. Till we see this we never look quite away from self to God. Sometimes perhaps the looking at our evil may be a partial instrument in teaching us it; but still even this is not all that is needed. In looking to Christ it is our privilege to forget ourselves. True humility does not so much consist in thinking badly of ourselves as in not thinking of ourselves at all. I am too bad to be worth thinking about. What I want is, to forget myself and to look at God who is indeed worth all my thoughts. Is there need of being humbled about ourselves? We may be quite sure that will do it.

Beloved, if we can say (as in chap. 7) that “in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,” we have thought quite long enough about ourselves. Let us then think about Him who thought about us with “thoughts of good and not of evil” long before we had thought of ourselves at all. Let us see what His thoughts of grace about us are, and take up the words of faith, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

The Prodigal With The Father

Luke 15

I take this chapter because one finds that there are many sincere souls who are not in the second condition of this repentant prodigal—that is, when he had been kissed, and robed, and was in the house with the Father—they have not real peace with God. They are still lingering on the way; and if they know salvation is a real thing thus given, they are not living in the enjoyment of it. As to their state of mind, they have not eaten of the fatted calf, nor have they got on the best robe; they are not living with the Father on the ground of what the Father has shewn Himself to be.

It is striking the moment the Father comes, except the confession of the son, you hear nothing about him; all is about the Father. From the time of his confession the whole scene is the Father's mind, and the Father's ways—what His heart is, and what His house can afford; and that is the true Christian state, and what the heart has to be brought to enjoy. I take up that special point of view now. Many are sincere, yet are not on this ground, and the Lord shews us that this is so; we should ever cry, "Abba, Father," as having this conscious place with Him.

There are two very distinct states in the prodigal; only in the second do we really learn the father's thoughts and feelings, and not the prodigal's, but the effect upon him; and there he rests. We do not find judgment here, it is all grace. Judgment is a real thing, and the Lord will lay hold of the conscience by it; but it is not the subject here, salutary as it is. Neither is it the blood presented to God, as meeting that judgment, all true and important

as it is; but God in justifying grace, and then the way the soul enters into the enjoyment of that grace. We never should lose sight of the other; but the side on which the gospel is presented here is not that judgment is outstanding, and that the blood is there to meet it, but the joy of divine love in blessing the wanderer brought back by grace.

And we must not confound this with the government of God. He may be angry even with His own child. It is different from the manifestation of His nature, so that there is no possibility of allowing sin in His presence. In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, and the wrath of God is revealed, and that from heaven; not merely judgments and punishment, not merely dealing with man, but the nature of God being perfectly revealed, so that He cannot have a single sin. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men.” In the holiness of His nature He abhors and rejects the sin, and in the righteousness of His nature He judges it. Hence, when we speak of the Christian state, we walk in the light, as He is in the light. It is not now certain conduct that has to be measured and dealt with. God has no measure with sin (there are indeed “many stripes” and “few stripes”). He is a holy Being, and there is positive rejection of all sin in His nature. Even in paradise, it is not now merely innocence; it came out previously; but man left that state and then judgment comes on him, and he is to return to the dust from which he was taken —present judgment that marked God’s displeasure. It is dreadful enough to see that God may chasten His own; but to find that people are shut out from the presence of the Lord for ever, from God’s favour, that is what is so

terrible. There is no veil over the glory of God. If you have to do with God at all, you must deal with Him, not as under the law, when there was a veil and God was hidden, but now He has come out, and wrath from heaven has been fully revealed. This is not the side we have here, but the grace which goes out to seek, and how the soul is brought back to enjoy this grace.

We have the whole Trinity in this chapter, but not as a doctrine; the good Shepherd looks after the sheep; the Spirit seeks for a soul, and Grace receives it when it comes back. We find the activity of God in grace, in Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; and lastly, the way the soul is received by the Father. In the first two you have not the whole truth: you have in the last. The shepherd has lost his sheep; he goes after it wandering farther and farther away, and brings it back, while the sheep never lays foot to the ground. The woman cares for the silver piece, seeks diligently until she finds it, when there could be nothing that passed in it—the simple power of grace bringing back what is lost. Then there is another—thank God, not a new principle, but a most blessed and lovely one, that runs through it all, that it is not our joy to be saved, but God's joy to save!

The Pharisees and publicans murmured. It is a righteous principle, and some may have it in their hearts still, that people must be righteous for God. The Pharisee thinks he has righteousness for God; we have that described in the elder brother. You do not need to be a Jew to be a Pharisee— what the Lord speaks of as a whited sepulchre, full of all uncleanness. The elder brother is the Pharisee in all ages; it is the most hateful thing that exists. A Pharisee has no sense of sin, else he would know that he was a sinner; no sense of holiness, or of

love; there is nothing more foreign to the heart and mind of God than his state; it is the most thorough selfishness, and not a thought of anything else— “Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.” When he says, “Child, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine,” he refers to the Jews; the law, the prophets, Christ Himself as coming in the flesh, the worship of God, the word of God, all He had was theirs. The use they made of it was another thing; they had got enough to be proud of it, but not to enter into the Father’s heart; that was made known to the servants. “Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.” That ought to have touched his heart. He should have said, If my father is happy it must be right; but he objects to everything. The Father went out even to this Pharisee; but nothing could win the self-righteous man; his heart is unwinable by God! He had no sense of righteousness or holiness, or he would know perfectly well, that if all that was in his heart was brought out, he would be ashamed of himself and go and hide. The Pharisee has no thought of that; he is hypocritical, only making the outside of the cup clean, as if God could not see its inside as well as its outside. But if man’s righteousness was the way to God, why should He have given His Son?

The Lord here takes up the way in which the soul returns to God, and He chooses the case of one who had gone to excess of riot as the prodigal eating husks with the swine. Many have not done that, but He takes this case to shew that grace reaches him there, and that is God’s delight—the joy of God, to bring him back and receive him. Remark this—the moment the soul has got

hold of what God is, the grace of God has found entrance into the heart. It is not feeding on husks which is the worst thing; nor is there any real difference in people; some are upright and honest, others are sunk in debauchery; but as regards the heart, when you come to the root of the matter, there is not one bit of difference. Suppose I was brought up among thieves and drunkards, I would be a thief and a drunkard. It is a great mercy to be separate; that is connected with circumstances.

Here, in the first act of the young man, the whole mischief was done. To turn his back on his father was doing his own will. Scripture says, there is “no difference” before God; there is in wickedness and vice, of course; but all have sought their own pleasure and their own way. When he crossed the threshold he was in will as much a sinner as when with the swine. There are differences among men; quite true. And man reaps what he sows. But as regards his state of soul, the young man was as much a sinner then as when eating the husks; and what is more, he was nearer returning when there; there was no pretence then that he was not perishing. It is the principle of all men, everywhere, to say, “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” We like our own will; we like to be free from God to do our own will. It is perfectly immaterial what it is; that is our history as men: “we have every one turned to his own way,” and that brings these wretched fruits. That is what all are; some have come back; but looked at as children of Adam, you have your back upon God, and your face on your own pleasures. There is no return till that is confessed.

The Lord takes the case of one who has gone to excess. The point was, leaving his father's house, and his getting back there. Suppose a son goes off in wild wickedness from his father's house, he may not have been a thief, or the like, but he is always doing wrong, till he comes back; and nothing will be right until he comes back. "If thou wilt return, saith the Lord, return unto me," Jer. 4:1.

Now, as to his return: "There arose a mighty famine in that land." Another thought as to the heart is, it never returns to God till there is a famine in the world. As long as people are in health, very rich and gay, they ruin themselves. When that is gone—when the natural pleasure gone, what then has the heart? It has spent itself, and is going to die! "Thou fool!" that is all the Lord has to say to that! (Luke 12:20). He had got to Satan's world, and the heart finds nothing there to satisfy it. You see those that can spend their substance; and there is a certain gaiety of nature which seems like happiness; but leave such only for a day, and you will find how their heart has its canker at the core. There is in many a heart the sense that there is a famine in the world. Why are there so many concerts and crystal palaces? Because of the famine. They try to keep up their heart, to do without God; but it is all in vain; they cannot! They would not have to take so much pains to make themselves happy, if they were so. They may get on merrily, but all these "artificers in brass and iron" are but efforts to make a city without God, and sufficiently pleasant to forget Him!

When the famine was there, he began to be in want. That never turns the heart to God: "And he joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into

his fields to feed swine." Drinking and pleasure and excitement did not satisfy; "and no man gave unto him." There is no giving there; there is selling oneself. When the heart is away from God, this want never turns it to Him, but to what satisfies the flesh. "He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat"; a description of where he had got to, the sense of famine not bringing him to God at all.

"When he came to himself," there is a total change. He was like a mad man before; identified with the place where the famine was. The goodness of God comes into his heart, he says, "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare?" Not, I shall get it, or I would like to have it, or How should I be received? But the sense of goodness is awakened in the soul, and this produces a want of another kind—a sense of the blessedness of God! When the Holy Ghost works in the soul, there is always a want. I want more holiness, more grace, I want God. He sees blessedness with God, and would give anything to be back with Him. The servants had bread enough and to spare; there is goodness with God.

Wherever there is a revelation of self, and man is conscious of his real state, there is always a sense of the goodness of God. He is in the frame of mind you find at times in souls—Well, if I perish, I perish at the cross. It attracts him. Conscience is awakened; but the heart is attracted, "I will arise and go to my father," that is everything. He had turned his back on his father, left God behind him; now it is not that he has got to his father, but his face is turned towards him, and his heart too, and that is an immense thing! He has not peace yet; but it is an immense thing when God and the soul meet;

when want of holiness and want of love is created, and there is a revelation that has attracted the soul to God. That which characterises him when he came to himself is, that he thinks there is goodness, and abundance, and plenty there. He did not know that he would be let in, but there was the goodness there to be let in to. "And I perish with hunger" —I have got away from God, and I am perishing as a man living without God— "I will arise and go to my father." The moment it is so, God and the soul have met. Orthodox as the Pharisees were, they had not God. Nicodemus says, You must be a teacher come from God; but the Lord says, You have not the principle which connects you with God; I cannot touch flesh; "ye must be born again." God and the soul have met, the quickening power of God gives consciousness that he is perishing, and there is a distinct result, "I will arise and go to my father," not I will get better, change my ways. He must change his ways; but that is not what is in his heart. "I will arise and go to my father." It is want of God that characterises him. The sense of love that makes the heart want God, a totally different thing from the desire to mend myself—that is the work of the Spirit of God. The next thing is honest confession— "I have sinned against heaven and before thee." It is often a long while before we get up to this and say, I have no title; and if so, how can I be there?

That was what the Lord was doing with the Syrophoenician. He said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." "Truth, Lord (she replied), yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." I have no title; I am just a wretched dog; but there is goodness enough in God for those who have no title.

It may be a long process before the soul comes to that point of full blessing. Without a holy nature we cannot enjoy Him; but you cannot make righteousness or a ground of acceptance out of it. The prodigal has nothing to say to the blessing till everything is spent. The pride of the human heart finds it very difficult to get there. Some things are fit for God, it says. Are you fit for God? I ask. It is not what is in God meets your case, but what is in you will, you hope, meet God's case. This is all wrong, totally wrong from beginning to end— "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." You must come down; you have no title to anything whatever, and all depends on simple grace to those that are entitled to nothing but wrath.

Another thing, we have seen the young man's heart brought to turn to God. His eyes were opened, and God had met him; he had not yet met God. He acknowledged his sins; all quite right; the consequence is, he begins to reason how he will be with God when he meets Him. "Make me as one of thy hired servants." What does that prove? That he had never met God at all. Lowliness, confession, is all right; but making terms shews he had not given up all hope in self, but thought he might have some small place, some little corner in heaven. God's presence is there, and can you pretend to be fit for His presence with all these rags?—every proof of having been in the far country? With his heart drawn to God, he confessed he was unworthy, yet still hoped. All proved he had not got to his father. The father had met him and touched his heart in grace, but he had not, in conscience, come to God at all! That is what I press.

There was a work of God in the man's soul, a sense of sin, of perishing, of bread in his father's house; but this

thought, because he had not met God, was all wrong; it was reasoning how it would turn out when he came. He had no terms to make with his father when he met him. You find numbers of sincere souls, who have seen the goodness of God and yet only hope in a general way; they have not met God to find out what God's thoughts are. They are reasoning from their condition, partly fearing, partly hoping for a poor servant's place. All proves they have not met God, though God has met them. He had met that young man. All perfectly true; but he was not judging from what God was, and had been; he had not given himself up as nothing but sin, so as to know what God was to those who have nothing but sin. "He arose and came to his father."

Now, in a certain sense, he disappears when the father comes in sight, and the whole blessing comes from, and is the result of, what the father is to this poor creature. All right his returning; but what is the effect of it? To bring him to his father with all the traces of the far country, in a condition totally unfit to go into the house. It would be a disgrace to have him in the house with those filthy rags—a perpetual dishonour. Then the elder brother might reproach and say, Look at this wretch; is he fit to be in the house with you? The effect of the experience of God's work in our hearts is to bring us to God in our sins. Did he not come in rags and nakedness the whole journey, just as he came out of the far country? Until we submit to that, we never get peace. We are saying, Make me a hired servant. It is not self-righteousness, but reasoning from our thoughts and feelings as to what God will be. But that is giving God the character of Judge; and if He is our Judge, it is everlasting destruction to us.

Are there not hearts who may read this, right in purpose, thinking of their state and condition, and how it will turn out when they meet God? Why not confess you have not met Him yet? (I do not say He has not met you.) You have never known Him. Why not put yourself just in the state the Lord is insisting on? “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him.” Now he comes to be kissed in his rags. The father deals in absolute grace with him just as he was. The effect of this kind of experience is to bring me to Him in my rags, and to find Him loving me, such as I am, in a condition totally unfit to be in the house.

But he did not bring him in in his rags, but “fell on his neck and kissed him.” The father acted from his thoughts and feelings and mind, and the only effect of the wretchedness of the son was to draw out the compassion of the father! That is what I learn in Christ. “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” The very essence of Christianity is that we have not to meet God as a Judge; and that because we could not He has come to meet us in grace. Sovereign grace has dealt with sinners, to shew that God in love is greater than their sins! The simple but blessed footing we are on with God, is not what we are for God (this has to do with government), but what God is for us. He “commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” He does not look for righteousness, but He brings it; He will have the fruits of it afterwards; but the grace of God brings salvation. The very essence of Christianity (by which we too have to act in grace) is, not what God finds, but what He brings.

He is brought to confess what he is, but with the father on his neck; and he does not then say, “Make me as one

of thy hired servants." Why? Because he had met his father, and he had acted as a father. He could not say, when he was kissing him, Make me a servant; it would be slighting grace! Ah! he had met his father, and knew his position. How? By being with him, and finding what his father was for him. The whole thing depended on what his father was for him.

Now, are you content, that your position and acceptance should depend on what God is for you, and not on what you are for God? Are you content to give up all title to His grace? If there is pride, and the old man still working, you will say, Must I not have this or that? Try your hand at it, and see what it will come to. The Lord wants you so to learn that you will never think of saying, Make me a servant. You will then have learned the Father's heart, and your relationship, a son's place, because you have found it in the Father's house. Thus, grace has gone out, and righteousness has gone in! "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." That which the father has to put on him is out of his own treasure (the young man had got his share before, he had nothing of his own); it was that which was put on him when he came back, that when he went in he might be a witness to the whole house of his father's thought about him; that it was the father's joy to have him there in honour. We come in, not simply with our rags off, but with Christ on; we are "made the righteousness of God in him." He brings us to His own presence in the fulness of His own grace; and He puts the best robe on us, so that all may say, There is a son the father delights in. There is nothing now about the son feeding on the fatted calf, but the father and servants. No doubt he did so; but this is the way God receives a person; it is His own delight to

have him, and the greatest delight of God is Christ; and He puts that upon him. We thus have righteousness, and glory too, in due time.

Thus there is a total difference between God meeting the soul, and the soul meeting God. All the reasoning you find, how it may turn out, and the like, characterises the state when God is meeting it in sinfulness. It is experience we get when the son was on his way to the father. I may get on slowly, or get on quickly, but that is experience, and experience is not righteousness. You never find in Scripture, Being justified by experience, we have peace with God j it is “by faith.” Faith in what? In what has passed in my heart? Then I may doubt about my own heart, Surely it is not what I ought to be; all that does go on in the heart. But it is not the father’s dealing with the son—not a bit. Experience was there, but experience led him in rags to the father’s presence—the rest is all what the father is!

Are you content to be on that ground; a mere sinner, to be put by the Father’s grace into the Father’s house? It is Christ, of course, who is the best robe, as my righteousness. Then the soul sits down and enjoys all the Father has to give. Ah! you will find it hard, there is so much selfishness in the heart, to bow to dependence on what God is for you. Strange to say it, but you will. If you submit to God’s righteousness you will then have true holiness, but never until you have the certainty of salvation. How can a child have filial affections if he has not a father? An orphan is capable of them. So, if I am born of God, I have a nature capable of enjoying Him. But if I have not the sense of relationship, I cannot have peace. We have the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. If we look up to God, is there the

consciousness that you look to a Father? Not a hope, but that your affections can go out on that footing, because you know Him as a Father? You cannot have blessed, holy affections which delight in Him as a Father until consciously in the position which that relationship entails. I do not say that you are not on the road.

Do not be merely satisfied with being saved. When first I am saved, all my affections go out, and I say, What a mercy! But I am uneasy when I see a Christian resting too much upon what he was as a sinner; that is not a healthy state. I believe we shall remember it in heaven. "The Lamb as slain" will be before us there, never to be forgotten. But if only there, and not occupied in thinking of what He is, I will not get on. A soul that is in the Father's house, is it not to grow up to know what the Father's heart is? I was outside, and He took me in to learn it there.

I would now ask you, Are you in the best robe? In Christ is your place. Is your heart there? The conscience must be cleansed, of course; but, is the place of your heart with the Father, living there in the affections which belong to that condition, or, are you uncertain? That is not a Christian state, though you may be on the way to it. Are you content to take your whole condition and blessing from what the Father is to you?

The Lord give you to see what you are, so that you may find you have a new place in Christ, and nothing to do with the old thing. The Father brings the son to His own heart and His own house.

The Counsel Of Peace

Zechariah 6:13

This chapter, written after the return of the Jews from Babylon, and when they were seeking to rebuild the temple, was intended to encourage them in that work. It speaks therefore of Joshua, Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah (those who had come from Babylon), by name. But “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation”; and although some event previously to take place may occupy the chief part of it, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is looked forward to as the ultimate point, the true consummation. So here, after an allusion to the history of God’s providence in the four great monarchies, and to the judgment of Babylon, the prophet comforts the hearts of those who were returned thence with a direct prophecy of Christ.

Christ is the great object of the love of God, and the Spirit of God in Scripture always looks on to Him. No matter what the substance of the prophecy, no matter what the circumstances of those addressed, He looks forward, seeing all things as they concern Christ, and His future glory. The Jews, for instance, had many deliverers raised up for them of God in times of need (Neh. 9:27)— “saviours who saved them out of the hand of their enemies”; but the moment the Holy Ghost begins to speak of these many “saviours,” He ever looks out further: they were all but types of the “Saviour.” When Adam fell, and judgment came in, Christ is promised, the woman’s Seed, as the bruiser of the head of the serpent. After the trial of Abraham’s faith in Isaac, the promise is made unto his Seed, “which seed is

Christ." Again, "out of Egypt have I called my son," we are taught, referred to Christ. And so here: "He shall build the temple of the Lord; even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne." It is "the man whose name is The Branch" who shall do all this. Zerubbabel is merely a type. Nothing is spoken casually, but all with a view to the ultimate purpose of the glory of God in Christ. Whether it affect the destinies of man, of Israel, or of the church, all centre in Jesus; God's thoughts about Jesus are marked on all.

It must have been a great comfort to the saints of old to have future glories thus opened to them, for whenever the Holy Ghost had awakened spiritual desires in any heart, those desires could not be satisfied with anything then seen of temporal deliverance or blessing. Much had they to thank the Lord for—to sing His praise for what He had done; but there was always either the actual presence of evil, or the fear of danger and evil still. In the days of Josiah, when there was so great a returning to the ways of the Lord, and such a pass-over kept that the like of it had not been since the days of Samuel the prophet, yet even then was Jeremiah uttering denunciations against the evil of the people, and the Spirit of God, in denouncing their sin, ever referred to the new covenant, holding out the Lord Jesus as the One in whom alone the fulness of blessing was to centre.

And so with the church now. We have indeed greater blessings and clearer revelations, but still there is evil, for we are yet in the body. In times of the greatest revivals, there has ever been that mixed with them which tended to evil. We have surely much cause to thank God and rejoice, but nothing really to satisfy. We

must still be looking onward to the future blessings in Christ. Never, till He appears, will the full desires of our hearts be given us; never, until we “awake in his likeness,” shall we really be “satisfied.” Nothing less will suffice, because the Spirit of Christ is in us. Constant dissatisfaction and constant thanksgiving meanwhile; for, if we know Jesus risen, nothing short of the full power of His resurrection can content. Our hopes run on to God’s ultimate purpose of complete blessing.

And here we have unity of hope with the Jews. They, indeed, are looking for earthly glory—their city and temple being rebuilt, etc.—that part of the future blessing in Christ of which Psalm 72 speaks; and we also look forward to see the earth “filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah,” whilst Christ’s own proper portion in the heavenly glory is our peculiar hope. Both earthly and heavenly glories meet in Jesus, and will be manifested when He comes. He is the Head of both. “The counsel of peace “is between Jehovah and the Messiah.

But where is Jesus now? As “the man whose name is The Branch,” the “priest upon his throne” —an earthly throne—He does not yet rule; peace is not yet established upon the earth, for Satan is yet exercising his power. But there is a throne upon which He does sit. He has sat down upon the “Father’s throne” — “at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” and this “when he had by himself purged our sins.” There He is as the High Priest of His people. And thus is given to us a plain revelation of “the counsel of peace.” Peace is our portion even now. We are set in the exercise of faith, by which we know and have this peace in our souls, whilst waiting

for its establishment on the earth, and the time of the manifested glory.

There is a “counsel of peace” which belongs to us, an assured peace, peace indeed in the midst of present trouble, but still God’s peace. If it were not God’s peace, it would be good for nothing. I may, it is true, have my spirit much disturbed, and know trial of heart; but still I have a title to perfect peace amidst it all—not only peace with God, but peace concerning every circumstance, because God is “for us” in it all.

Had not man been in rebellion against God, there would have been no need for “the counsel of peace.” Adam in paradise needed it not. But man has rebelled, and, though its modifications may be various, rebellion against God is still the characteristic of the unconverted heart. Such was his rebellion, that peace between man and God seemed impossible. But now, wondrous grace! we see that there is not only peace, but a “counsel of peace”—thoughts of God concerning peace, thoughts which Jesus alone could meet. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!”

Supposing God had made peace with Adam, the peace could not have lasted: the enmity in the heart of man, or that produced by the power of circumstances thwarting his will, would very soon have broken it again. Look at Israel. They were placed in outward peace with God, owned as His people, favoured in every way; and yet what was the result? Continual murmuring on their part, constant rebellion. As to moral peace with God, they had scarcely undertaken to keep His law when they set up a golden calf to worship, and thus failed directly. And it would always be the same; it must be so, for the very

will of man is altogether wrong; “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

But now “the counsel of peace” is between God and Jesus, instead of man, and hence security. It is not merely peace, but “the counsel of peace.” The word “counsel” implies deliberate purpose. What solidity must there be in that peace which God had a “counsel” about, and all the engagements of which the mind of Jesus fully entered into and accomplished! I have said that peace is our proper portion as the children of God—peace both as to sin and as to circumstances. Now it is true that the latter we have not outwardly yet, but God is taking up all that concerns us, and has taken upon Himself to make “all things work together” for our good; and the knowledge of this gives peace (if we will use our privilege) in all circumstances, be they even those of trial, perplexity, and sorrow. Was it not so with Jesus? who can be so tried as He? “Consider him that endured such contradictions of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”; yet He had always peace. And so might we: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.”

But then it is most important to see that “the counsel of peace “is entirely between God and Jesus. The moment we begin to rest our peace on anything in ourselves, we lose it. And this is why so many saints have not settled peace. Nothing can be lasting that is not built on God alone. How can you have settled peace? Only by having it in God’s own way. By not resting it on anything, even the Spirit’s work, within yourselves, but on what Christ has done entirely without you. Then you will know

peace; conscious unworthiness, but yet peace. In Christ alone God finds that in which He can rest, and so it is with His saints. The more you see the extent and nature of the evil that is within, as well as that without and around, the more you will find that what Jesus is, and what Jesus did, is the only ground at all on which you can rest.

God could no more rest in anything here, than Noah's dove could find a rest for her feet amidst the wrath and destruction that deluged the world. But Jesus comes in, and here—on this earth, where honour to God was wanting—here He glorified God. When God's eye rested upon Jesus, He was perfectly satisfied. Till that moment God had not seen anything in this earth of which He could say, as of itself, in this "I am well pleased." He had gone on, it is true, dealing with man in love and grace, but He could find nothing wherein to rest. "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one," etc., was what God saw when he "looked down from heaven." But when Jesus was searched throughout, nothing was found but perfect love and perfect devotedness to God; even when forsaken of God, He still justifies Him— "thou art holy." Had it ended there, had it been only Christ's own perfectness, all the result would have been to shew out the more clearly our sinfulness and ruin by the contrast. But according to "the counsel of peace," He gave Himself. Peace was ever His; it was for us that He "made peace by the blood of the cross"; and thus is He, unto God, a "sweet savour of rest" for us.

Our peace is established in what He did, and "the counsel of peace" is "between them both." Jesus has accomplished that which God purposed towards us. In

order to this, it was needful that He should “bear our sins,” and this He did as the “sin-offering.” He was made “sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” In the sacrifices, when the offerer laid his hand upon the head of the victim, there was in that act the complete identification of himself with the victim. Now there are two great characters in the sacrifice of Christ: the one, that of the burnt-offering; the other, that of the sin-offering. We lay our hands on Him as the “burnt-offering,” thus identifying ourselves with Him. “Accepted in the beloved,” all His perfectness, all His “sweet savour” unto God is ours. But then as to the “sin-offering,” it is just the reverse with the hand laid upon the victim; it became identified with my sins, charged with my guilt.

Well, beloved, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus had this double character. He has completely accomplished the purpose of God, all that which was in “the counsel of peace.” This “counsel of peace “was not between me and God, though I have, as the fruit of it, the enjoyment of the peace. I had not to do with it in any sense; it was “between them both.” All is done, and Jesus, both the accomplisher and the accomplishment, in proof that all is finished, has sat down on the throne of God.

But it may perhaps be added, Why, if the work is perfectly accomplished, is He yet a Priest upon the throne? He is not there at all as a Priest to work out righteousness for us: that He has done, and done completely: “this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God.” His sitting down is the proof that He has nothing more to do in that way for His friends, and now He only waits “till his enemies be made his footstool.”

But then, in order that we may have the enjoyment of these things, He is acting in another way as Priest. Having the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, we consequently see many things in ourselves contrary to Him—many things that would hinder fellowship with God. Now here it is that the present ministry of Christ comes in. We need His priesthood in order to maintain our communion with God; we need Him in our daily sins, as it is said, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." We need the presence of perfect righteousness on our behalf before God; who has ever before His eyes, and that "for us," the accomplisher of "the counsel of peace," "Jesus Christ the righteous."

Here then is "the counsel of peace" which was purposed between God and Jesus. Here, and here only, have we peace. If ever our souls have any idea of rest except in that which is the perfect rest of God; if ever we are looking for peace anywhere else, be it where it may, we have got out of God's way of accomplishing peace, off the ground of this "counsel of peace." He has not called us into "the counsel," which really is entirely independent of ourselves— "between them both" — accomplished, sure, and everlasting. Nothing can ever touch it. God has publicly owned His acceptance of Christ's work, by seating Him at His own right hand. The Holy Ghost is sent to witness to us that Jesus is now "on the throne of God," having "by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

We may have a great deal of trial (we know we shall), trial from circumstances around, trial from within, exercise of conscience, and the like; but still we have the perfect certainty of God's favour; and "if God be for us,

who can be against us?" With Paul we may reckon, because of His having given Jesus for us, along with Jesus upon everything. This is the true way to reckon upon His kindness— "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus." Observe, he says, "the peace of God." Again, the word is "be careful for nothing": if one single thing were excepted, God would not be God. Well, if exercised, and troubled in spirit, tempted to be "careful," let us go to God about it. Our wishes may possibly be foolish wishes: still, let us go and present them to God; if they are so, we shall very soon be ashamed of them.

We have need of this "counsel of peace," because all that we are in ourselves is enmity against God. I cannot go out of this "counsel "to look at my own heart for a moment: it is "between them both." Is the Christian to make Christ's cross less complete? On that alone his peace can rest. The moment we come to establish its perfectness, the moment we seek to add a single thing, we are adding to, or rather taking away something from, the perfectness of "the counsel of peace."

Who or what shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, these things shall, as means for mortifying the flesh, only minister to Christ's glory. Shall death? It will only bring us into His presence. Shall life? It is that by which we enjoy His favour. "Nothing shall separate"! He is "on

the throne” as the eternal witness of peace accomplished, and thence He ministers it to us.

The Lord give us grace to look at Him alone!

Christ, Or Antichrist

John 5:17-47

There are three very important characters in which the Lord Jesus is presented to us in these verses:—

First, as the subject of testimony;

Second, as the giver of life;

Third, as the executor of judgment.

Now He stands in relation to all men in one or other of these positions.

First, He presents Himself as the subject of testimony, but it is nevertheless as coming in the Father's name. "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true," v. 30-32. His own witness was also true; but that which He states is, that He seeks not to glorify Himself, He demands not their confidence, He asks them not to believe. Just as He says elsewhere, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." And this ever holds good. If a man is seeking to exalt self, he has a motive that is not truth— his witness is not true. At the same time there was a witness unto Himself, and as such He appeals to all the various testimony that existed for Him in the world. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth," a. 33. Again, "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear

witness of me," v. 36. Again, "The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me," v. 37. And again, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me," v. 39.

The Lord Jesus refers to these four witnesses: firstly, John; secondly, his works; thirdly, the Father; fourthly, the Scriptures: and yet He tells those to whom He spoke, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," v. 40. Presented with this full and adequate testimony to the consciences of men (not merely an abstract testimony, but that which was suited to their circumstances), they refused it all: they would not come to Him that they might have life. And mark the terrible conclusion, "Ye will receive" this evil one. "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive," v. 43. What a testimony against man!

Another character in which we find the Lord Jesus presented here is in life-giving power: "As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will," v. 21. Life-giving is attributed both to the Father and the Son.

But there is marked distinction in that which follows, as to the third character of Christ—the executor of judgment. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son," v. 22. As "Son of man," He has been dishonoured and rejected by men; therefore all judgment is committed into His hands, in order "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father," v. 23. Here He stands alone. And see the point that is settled here.

When the Lord Jesus presents Himself as giving life, He also, and most graciously, shews us how we may count on the assurance of possessing life. Now this is of the very last importance. There is many a one that can with truth of heart own Him as the giver of divine life, who nevertheless is unable to say, I have that life. Our Lord does not leave the anxiety of such unanswered. After stating that all men (even those who had rejected Him, as we have seen) one day in His character of Judge should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father, He adds, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment]; but is passed from death unto life,” v. 24.

The question is one of judgment or of life. We have seen that the Father gives life, and the Son gives life. We have seen, too, that all judgment is committed unto the Son. But here Jesus shews who is to come under the judgment, and who is to have life. This answers the question at once. He says, He that believes “hath” not shall have, “everlasting life”; and that such a one “shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life.” On this basis all happy feeling before God, all joy, is founded. Here begins the exercise of all holy affections and ways. A child cannot love its parent before it is born (there is no need to reason about that), though it may love long before it can express it, long before there is intellectual explanation.

Here is the difference between the law and the gospel. Law puts a man upon the acquisition of life, it sets him to do before he gets life. All Christian holiness, all Christian affections, flow from the fact of having life. The voice of the good shepherd reaches the ear, and he

who hears it, believing that the Father has sent the Son, has this assurance, he “shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” It would be to bring into doubt His own work were Christ to call such in question as to salvation. He ever keeps distinct His two offices of Life-giver and Judge.

It might appear that in verses 28, 29, He confounds the two. But is it so? No, He states a further truth. He had before been speaking of the quickening of the soul; and now He says, “Marvel not at this,” there is going to be a resurrection of the body also. It is in resurrection that He will fulfil the whole effect and result of His life-giving power. There will be a “resurrection of life,” and also a “resurrection of judgment.” The two things are kept most definite and distinct. But the honour of Christ as “Son of man “is secured from all. We (those who have believed) do not need judgment to oblige us to render Him honour; we honour Him now as the source of life; He has quickened us, forgiven us our sins; through Him we have fellowship with the Father: He has done everything for us. The wicked shall also honour Him then.

There is a remarkable passage in Romans 8 in illustration of this distinction. The apostle, after speaking of the law, takes up the result of the work of Christ, and says, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death,” etc., and then in verse 11, “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” That will not be true of the wicked at all; they will not be raised in virtue of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them,

they have it not. We see then, as it were, this great track of life. Christ is the Life-giver to His people; first to soul, and then to body.

The evidence to others of our having life is shewn in conduct, though that is not brought out here; but the proof and the assurance to my own soul is based on this, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life.” Whilst fruits will flow, and must flow, from faith in Christ, it is of the utmost importance, in the midst of the evil with which we are conversant, to have the ground on which peace rests as simple as possible; and this is just what God has made it. The work on which it is founded concerns all the Godhead. I see Christ coming out from the bosom of the Father, dying, and communicating life; that into which life so communicated brings, being all the Father’s purposes in the Son, etc. The link to my own soul is as simple as possible, it is not a long process of reasoning which might tend to puzzle and perplex, but the evidence of the word, “He that heareth,” etc. What is the effect of this? Christ becomes everything to us. Surely this is practical sanctification. If I wanted to describe a holy man, I should describe one who was always thinking of the Father’s love and the Son’s grace, and never of self.

Here then there is comfort and peace (and what a comfort is the settled certainty of salvation!) in this setting to our seal that God is true. It is not in the searching of my own heart, but in the assurance of the word of God. There is nothing like the simple certainty of faith. “He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.” I assume that I am a person in an anxious state of soul and wanting to get the certainty

of life possessed. I look at the testimony of God. There I get absolute certainty. I say, God is true. This is faith. All that I discover in myself is not faith. I may be much exercised; but there is not one thing in my own heart that can in the least assist me in finding out anything about this life. Faith rests upon the testimony of God. When I have received and rested upon His testimony, it is important for me to examine myself as to my ways and the like; but I never go and search into my own heart for certainty as to whether the blessed Son of God has told me the truth, “He that heareth,” etc. Observe, again, there is no searching any further than this: I believe on Him who sent the Son; in the presence of the Father and the Son, I have eternal life: who can give me more? Life may be fed indeed here, and glorified hereafter; but there is no searching any deeper. There may be exercises of soul in bringing to it; but the definition John gives of a Christian is this, “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” “Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us.” There is another point: the written testimony of God has a higher place than any other.

A few words more upon the difference between life-giving and judgment. Now it is that Christ gives life. When He comes as Judge, He will not give life at all, He will come for judgment. There is no confounding or mingling of the two things, either as to time or act. If judgment comes in before grace has given life, who can stand? Having seen the way of life, there is next the contrast of result, where testimony is not received. In the fall of our first parents we see sin in three distinct and principal elements. And these have continued to characterise man ever since. Man gives ear to Satan, or,

in other words, is led of the serpent; exalts himself to be as God; follows his own lusts, and is disobedient.

Scripture gives us the development of this, in principle all through, and shews that it will be so at the end. Man, whilst in the enjoyment of blessing, listens to and trusts Satan. But mark the suggestion of the devil, “Ye shall be as gods.” He can tell truth if it subserve sin. If we have the truth, nothing can barm us; but Satan can tell truth, a great deal of truth, provided he can only win attention by it and so deceive. See his temptation of our Lord. There he quotes Scripture, gives a promise of God, quite rightly applicable in a certain sense, had Jesus listened. The first Adam did so, and came by the ways of Satan to know good and evil. But it was by disobedience, and he continued not with God. Satan told not all the truth—he did not say, You shall be a lost creature. Lust worked, disobedience followed, and, consequently, exclusion from God’s presence.

But testimony of Christ has another element in it. It is not merely that man is a sinner; there has been the rejection of God in grace. What was the question when Christ was in the world? Not whether man had sinned; but would man, a sinner, receive testimony from God in grace? If you traced the history of man from the beginning until Christ came, you would say, his mouth must be stopped. Satan’s power over the heart is revealed throughout. Away from Paradise, instead of becoming better, Cain kills his brother. Then comes the deluge, sweeping away the whole race except eight persons; but afterwards they are as bad as ever. Noah gets intoxicated, Ham dishonours his father, and after that idolatry enters. Again, before Moses comes down from the mount the people have made a calf. Before the

eight days of solemn purification are over, Aaron's sons take strange fire and offer before the Lord. In short, in all God's dealings with Israel as a nation, this truth is strongly marked. The principle of the heart is wrong. Nay more, the nearer man is to God externally, the worse is ever the character of his guilt, if there be not living fellowship with Him. When Jesus came into the world, though He could get joy out of the Samaritans, and out of a poor Syrophoenician woman, whose condition was as a "dog" in respect of Jewish privileges, "his own" were found full of pride of heart and "received him not." Judas was quite close to Christ, yet he betrayed Him. The development of evil is just in proportion to its nearness to good, if the power of good is not there. So with Christendom. The name of Christianity, where there is not the living power of it, is the very place in which the worst evil is to be looked for.

And observe, here, the awful manner in which conscience can deceive itself. "The chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood"; there had been no scruple in giving the money for that blood. The very same money wherewith they had bought Christ, they will not put into the treasury! What a picture of man's heart, of man's consistency —exact about external ceremonial points, callous as to moral depravity!

But as to the question of the reception of testimony. Into this world of sin and iniquity, however bad man might have been proved it mattered not, the Son of man came down in grace. His testimony rejected— "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life" —what is the consequence? "I am come in my Father's name, and ye

receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." Here is a new form of evil. Man shall set himself up and be received, because he comes in his own name. And yet it is but the ripeness and development of his sin in Eden, the same in principle—only, after Christ; he then exalted himself to be as God—to act after his own will, though in reality he was the tool of Satan. The same thing shall come to pass again, testimony having been rejected, as it is said, "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," 2 Thess. 2. There will be a licence, and more than a licence too, for man to set himself up, to seek his own name—and "him ye will receive."

If you trace man's evil, you will find, it is true, a testimony to it bad enough, whatever the restraints God in His supreme power may have placed upon it. But there has been restraint, especially since the flood. Government met this point in the world, first, directly exercised amongst the Jews, and afterwards extended to the Gentiles in the four great empires, of which Nebuchadnezzar was the first head—the Babylonish, Persian, Grecian, and Roman. Passing over their general history, it will suffice to say, that the fourth of these empires had just come out in prominence when our Lord appeared on the earth— "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." The result of this, as well as of religion in man, was brought out in His rejection. All joined together—the heads both of civil and religious power —to crucify Christ. The cry of the Jews was, "We have no king but Caesar"; and Pilate, representative of Gentile dominion, knowing His innocence, acquiesced in their malice.

Another thing was brought out, upon the accomplishment of all this evil in man: a testimony unto the heavenly blessedness of those who believe in Him whom the world had rejected. “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” There are those who believe on a record given of God’s Son, and eternal life belongs to them.

Well, now, if we find any religious form of evil, we find it here, in the profession of Christianity, not amongst the avowed haters of Christ. One special mark of the “perilous times” in “the last days,” concerning which we have prophetic testimony, is the “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,” the same thing in principle as amongst the Jews. The Pharisees were a religious people; they had the “form of godliness,” but Christ, the “power,” they “denied,” Acts 3:13. Wherefore the testimony against them is “Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.”

One great principle of religious forms of evil is, that they are always suited to the flesh. There is a religious tendency in man: he will bow down to something. You may find a hard spirit here and there, rejecting everything; but, as a general truth, man must have his religion. The “form of godliness “is just suited to this. Nature, through it, seeks to satisfy its holiness, whilst at the same time man’s will comes in—man is exalted. Whatever the flesh can look at, or do, or cling to, as man’s works, ordinances, etc., all these things will be esteemed. If it be but a “form of godliness,” though the straitest sect of the Pharisees, a great deal of truth may be held; there may be intellectual clearness of doctrine and the like; all this is within the compass of the flesh, and will be accredited by it. But there is one thing the

flesh can never do—it can never trust simply in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life, and have “peace with God.”

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of holiness. If truth (the form of it) comes to me without holiness, I cannot receive it as of the Spirit of God; and, vice versa, if there be apparent holiness without truth. There is always thus, for the humble believer, a corrective or counter-check, whereby he may detect the evil—Satan’s imitation.

But there is another thing testified of—the last form of wickedness—man’s will exalting itself against God. The principle has been always the same, but now it will come out in full development. “The king shall do according to his own will,” Dan. 11:36. Truth having been rejected, this is the result. There will be a public avowal of independence of God, man acting against God, speaking against God, but at the same time, exalting himself to be as God; 2 Thess. 2:4. Herein Satan’s agency will come out in manifest display. It is not merely the “form of godliness” (itself ensnaring enough, and liable to lead astray), nor yet even man’s will alone; no, it is declared to be a display of the “working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders,” v. 9. Awful passage! And see what follows. When God’s patience is exhausted, or rather has no more place, then He—yes, “God” Himself, “shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a he,” v. 11; “because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” God says, If you love a lie, you shall have a lie. His dealings with the Jews, upon their rejection of Him, are the same in principle. “Make the heart of this people fat, and make

their ears heavy, and shut their eyes," etc. Isaiah 6; John 12; Acts 28:26, 27.

But we find exactly the same testimony given about the profession of Christianity, as about the profession of Judaism. The "mystery of iniquity" had begun to work in Paul's time— "doth already work," says he; it is followed by the "falling away," or apostasy; and consummated in the appearance of Antichrist— "that man of sin." Satan's power, seductive power, and man's self-will, in independence of God, will terminate in this—man given up to the devil. But it will not be until the long-suffering of God has been tried to the uttermost; even as the sentence of judicial blindness on the Jews was pronounced 700 years before it was put in execution. At the present hour, that long-suffering has been 1800 years running on; but when the testimony of truth has been fully rejected, the doom will come.

People may deceive themselves, and say that these things are not to be looked for in a Christian land. It is just there, upon Christendom, that God's heaviest judgments will fall. After testimony God gave over the heathen to a "reprobate mind." (See Romans 1.) The Jew, with his special light, is given over to a fat heart. Where Christianity is professed, it is the same thing; a "form of godliness," the "love of the truth" not received, "pleasure in unrighteousness" —God gives over to "strong delusion."

Men love something. Trace the course of Judas: what was it that led him astray? He loved money, not so uncommon an evil. In this he was the world's prudent man— "men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." But observe the progress of corrupt nature; a

little circumstance in John 12:3, 6, may help us to see the connection. The lust there, Satan suggests a way to gratify it. Well, he goes on, and what is his next step? Satan puts it into his heart to betray his Master. Judas (it may be, thinking that the blessed One would have been delivered in some way, as at other times, and thus he get his money, and yet save his character) consents. Man will excuse himself by any folly. Sin has its progress with a defiled conscience. Hypocrisy now enters; he sits with Jesus at the table (goes on with religiousness), even after he had sold Him. Mark, too, it was “after the sop” that Satan entered, never nearer to Christ in form. Now he is hardened against even the relentings of nature, goes out and betrays the Son of man with a kiss. Here then is the progress of corrupt nature towards this fearful consummation—firstly, lust; secondly, a means of gratifying it in his office of bearer of the bag; all this goes on along with religiousness, in the very company of Christ, from day to day; thirdly, he is led to the ultimate character of his crime, at a time and in circumstances of most blessing to a true disciple; fourthly, the heart is hardened, so that the betrayal takes place even with a kiss, the token of affection. Sinning and religiousness go on together. Again we say, and here we have an illustration of it, that where the power of godliness is not, nearness to godly things is only the more dangerous.

Well, we have the solemn declaration that such shall be the history of Christendom. “And I saw three unclean spirits … which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty,” Rev. 16. That day, when the long-suffering of God shall have closed, and shall have

no more place, when in fact a longer delay would become the allowance of unrighteousness; judgment will then be according to this nearness. Its full tide will roll in upon Christendom.

We speak not of the judgment of the dead, but of the living. Where, then, is the resource from this dreadful progress and consummation of wickedness, in the pleace where righteousness is expected? It is not in man's will, for through that he is the slave of Satan; nor in forms of religiousness: Satan can enter in with the sop. Neither the one nor the other will keep him out. Man's natural power, his capacity to do great things, may be vaunted on the one hand; and on the other a reliance upon ordinances and observances may be insisted upon. For a time these may seem the most opposing schools, but a connecting link will be found in man's corrupt nature, managed by the craft of the great enemy; and at last both will subserve his purposes, who is to exalt "himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped: so that he sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." Where then is deliverance from the evil? where is the escape? The answer is most simple: In the fellowship of God's love. The place of special privileges unheeded, of special light, will be the place of special judgment.

A word in passing: Satan does not come all at once and say, I seek to turn you from God. He usually works by introducing that which would lead away from simplicity of reliance on the death of Christ—some "form of godliness" —and so ensnares. How are we to detect all this? In the first place the believer must be set in heaven (not in body but in spirit) in the presence of God Himself. That is now his true place. "The way into the holiest of all was not yet manifest, while as the first

tabernacle was yet standing." God was not revealed in His own full estimate of good and evil, before Christ and the cross. But now the holiest is open. The veil is rent. "The true light shineth." There is nothing between us and God. All is worthless that cannot stand in the light of His holiness. There were many things before which God did not approve, but which He permitted—Jewish divorcement, for instance (Mark 10:5). But at the death of Christ the full light of God's holiness, against the darkness of man's fully developed sin, was brought out. The veil was rent from top to bottom.

Divine goodness had come into the world, and displayed itself with every witness: what had man shewn himself to be? A hater of divine goodness, in deliberate judgment. The full evil of the world, and, in the accomplishment of righteousness for us, the full grace of God, both came out at the cross. All the pains God had taken to reclaim man, as culture to a good-for-nothing tree, only resulted in his bearing more bad fruit, until the deliberate evil of his nature in hatred to God, was shewn in the death of Christ. This was the climax of his sin. But here also was shewn God's perfect love. Man's hatred to God come in goodness is one side of the cross, and the other is God in His highest act of love towards man in vileness.

God's own holiness has now come completely out. Since the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is no longer a question of coming up step by step to God. If man stand before God at all, he must stand in contact with the full light of His holiness. How did that light burst forth? In the absolute putting away of the sin of every believer, and that by the worst act of man's sin. The very sin that was detected by the light, that would

have hindered the soul's approach, was put away through the blow that brought Jesus to the death; and now the sinner stands in the absolute and full enjoyment of God's love. Such is His goodness! The more the searching eye of God rests on me, trusting to the perfect work of Christ, the more, as it were, does He discover the perfect value of the blood of Christ. The clearer the light, the more is it to shew that not a spot or stain is on me. What does He see? The efficacy of the blood of His own provided Lamb—that which has put away my sin. The same light that detects the sin manifests its being utterly, and for ever, put away; yea, has burst forth and shone in the putting it away. Here then is the safeguard. It is the knowledge of God's full putting away of sin—peace through the blood. I can have no thought of getting up to God, etc., when standing where Himself has brought me, even in His very presence.

We are called unto holiness, but what character does Christian holiness take? Not the character of our own nature at all, nothing is recognised as of us. It is, "that we might be partakers of his holiness." Man's nature has been proved to be incorrigibly bad, it has hated and crucified Christ: God cannot own it, He seeks nothing from it. He has satisfied Himself in the cross about our evil; and now He says, Be partakers of my good. Here again is a safeguard for the saints at the present hour. Those who, through the teaching of the Spirit of God, have learned this great and blessed truth, and through grace walk in fellowship with God, will be preserved from all legal attempts at holiness. They say, We want nothing before God, but only to glorify Him in our bodies. They are Christ before God, and they know it. Nothing else is wanted; nay, God would repudiate

anything else. It would be to call in question the sufficiency of Christ. Faith rests where God rests. What we have to do is to glorify Him by our life down here. But our walk down here is, nevertheless, not our standing before God in righteousness, though it be a testimony in man's sight to it.

Reader, have you rested where God rests? What does God think about Christ? Does your soul say, That is sufficient? God rests in Him as having made peace through the blood of the cross. Is that peace consciously yours? Salvation is the guard set up of God against the deceits of Satan.

Man’s Responsibility And God’s Promises

Galatians 3

There are two great points in this chapter:—

First, the effect of the law, when any one is under it;

Second, the contrast between law and promise, and whether it be by law, or by promise, that the blessing of the inheritance is ours.

In the early part of the chapter (I do not speak now of the first two or three verses), we are told that the effect of being under the law is to be “under the curse “; in the latter part, we find the blessings of the inheritance ours, not by law, but by promise: “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Thus are the counsels of God brought out, and that in a manner that applies itself to the constant tendency of the human heart and its actings, which ever go to exalt man, and to debase God.

It is singular the way in which the human heart is continually reasoning within itself, as if there was no distinct revelation from God of His mind—searching and inquiring in order that it may conclude something about itself and God. Now it is quite true that the power of grace must work, in order that this revelation should be understood, but it is not merely in the unconverted man there is this reasoning. Alas! he often reasons not at all about it, but goes on in his own way, careless, reckless, and unconcerned. In the heart of the saints there is constant reasoning with regard to their standing before

God. And, in all such cases, it is quite plain that faith is not in exercise. Whenever I begin to reason on the state of my own soul, faith is not in exercise. I do not say that the person is not a believer, but I say, faith is not in exercise. This is quite evident. Faith receives the testimony of God, and does not reason about it. There the difficulty lies. It is not that revelation is not plain, but that the heart of man is not subdued.

It is not a proof that faith is in exercise when I do not judge myself, because, when I judge myself, I judge myself before the Lord, in order to have removed whatever may be found within me that is wrong in His sight. Grace enables me to do this. But whenever there is any reasoning from myself as to my condition, faith is not in exercise. It is true this reasoning may follow upon belief in testimony (be, in that sense, a consequence of faith), but it is not faith. That is, I may believe there is a judgment to come, and that Christ can be my only Saviour (seeing there is not salvation in another, for "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"), and I may set about reasoning as to what will be my portion, whether I can say that Christ is my Saviour; but that is not, in itself, any right exercise of faith.

We shall find the testimony of the word of God to be most simple. Yet, wherever the natural conscience is awakened, there is a certain sense of responsibility to God (indeed that is, in a sense, the awakening of it)—the knowledge that God takes notice of all that is going on, of what we do, and the like, and that there is a judgment to come. Therefore the moment a man's conscience is so awakened (the grace of God not being known), he begins to inquire whether his conduct is such as God can

approve and accept; and thence he draws some inference as to his own future happiness or misery. This is the natural state of man—of every man that thinks about the matter. But it is, alas! the real condition too of multitudes of believers in Christ, and of those even who have once known redemption largely. There is a constant tendency in the heart to turn again to self—to a condition in which man stands responsible to God. It is always the case when the soul has got out of the power of the testimony of the Spirit of God as to the completeness of redemption; as also when we have not come to a distinct knowledge of the hopelessness of our condition before God as men. I say to a distinct knowledge; that is, when the soul has not estimated truthfully the hopelessness of its case, that in the flesh good does not dwell and become fully satisfied that everything—all the practical righteousness, holiness, or graciousness of the saint—is consequent upon the introduction of that new thing created in us by the power of God because of the risen Jesus.

We get in these Galatians an example of this, where the soul, after having had the knowledge of grace in Jesus Christ “evidently set forth crucified among them,” went back. They had “begun in the Spirit,” and they now thought “in the flesh” to add to what Christ had done. That is, that they could, by that which is in man, and of man—the old man too—add to that which is of the new man, Christ. And that, I repeat, beloved, is the constant tendency of the heart. Wherever there is not the distinct knowledge of the hopelessness of man’s condition before God, we go back to get from man something which may be added to what God has given us in the Lord Jesus Christ. John says, “This is the record, that God hath

given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Now if we do not know that the flesh cannot in any way come in and take a share or part in it, we are constantly adding and connecting something of the flesh.

God began by giving "promise." And here there was nothing at all of man. But, because (as we shall see more especially in the latter part of the chapter, where the apostle speaks about promise from God—promise coming from Him when there was nothing in man to call it out, except, indeed, the ruin and need of man), when He had given the promise, before He had completed that which He had promised— redemption, before the revelation of Christ, He knew the constant tendency of the human heart to seek to satisfy its own feeling of responsibility, God gave the full extent of His demand upon it, with the consequence of failure. Because, I say, He knew what was in the heart of man, its tendency from the first—natural tendency (that is, until redemption and grace are fully known) to judge about itself by itself as to its future state; and also the pride of man, which supposes something in man which can be brought to God, or something from man which can be done for God—before He did anything for the accomplishment of His promise, He brought in the law, thus trying man in responsibility to the utmost.

It is quite right, most assuredly, to be what God has required in His revealed will. God has required and demanded a certain amount of good in me, and I have the plain revelation of God about it. Therefore I cannot act as if there were no revelation. It is one of the sins of the heart of man, that of "intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind," thinking he can approach God by some means of

his own devising. God requires something that is not merely the work of man's hands, something real in the soul, something which has to do with man's relationship to Himself, and to his fellow-creature. There is this in the law—the direct requirement of God from man, of what man ought to be towards God and before Him. That is one way to take up the law. And, further, there is the prohibition of what sin had brought in.

There are these two things: first, what God requires positively of man, expressed in the summary given by our Lord— "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"; and then, as the other part, the prohibition of what man was indulging in. The law presented the requirements of God, that is, supposing man was right practically before God; and took cognizance of what man was not, and prohibited it. And that is all the law did; except, indeed, to pronounce the curse, if there was failure in the things required.

Now as soon as this is tried—the moment we get here, and see the law in this light—we find man at once brought in completely hopeless and helpless. And for this very reason, that he has done the things God forbids. He is "ungodly," but not only so; he is, moreover, "without strength." This is his condition naturally; and the moment there is real desire, and the endeavour, to serve God according to the law, it is found out. Supposing he desires (which I assume and grace produces it) to serve God, and not to do anything forbidden in the law, he discovers the very principle of his nature to be all wrong. There is a law in his

members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members, which has selfishness for its basis, and corruption for its object. It is in himself. Hence the reason that we so often find persons crying out, “O wretched man that I am!” Moreover, when he comes to see what is in himself, it is that which brings him down into despair. It is not his past sins—he could easily suppose God might forgive them, nay, perhaps, that they are forgiven, put away, when he was first converted. The trial is not there. But when he feels the principle of those sins to be in himself—the principle that produced them there still and working in him, now that he lives and “delights in the law of God after the inner man” —it is this which casts him down. And cast down he remains until he apprehends the ministry of grace.

Now, beloved friends, you see God has given law for the prohibition of evil. And, taking it in that point of view, He gave it to man already in sin. It came in after two things, evil and the promise. It was a thing “added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made” (v. 19), neither the original condition of man, nor the purpose of God about man. It “came in,” it is said (though its elements, no doubt, are everlasting and eternal truth), “by the bye,” added because of transgressions. “The law entered, that the offence might abound,” Rom. 5:20. Hence we are taught, that its object was to make plain and evident—to discover that perverseness of the will of man, which would never otherwise have been discovered—the inclination, where there is the knowledge of good, and the desire after good, to do evil; and, therefore, the hopelessness of man’s case before God. Man is

concluded under sin (v. 22). That is the effect of the law. It was quite clear that man delighted in sin. Natural conscience sufficed to shew there was sin and guilt. But then the law came in and was added to these, “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God,” Rom. 3:19.

What is said here? “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse,” v. 10. Mark the force of that expression. It is not, as many as are living in sin, neither yet, merely, as many as as have broken the law (though that is the reason of it); but “as many as are of the works of the law.” How universal the statement! It is quite true that man is under “the curse of the law,” because he has been the breaker of the law; but it is all who are of the works of the law who are under that curse. The law was not given to prohibit lust, until man was a wilful creature—a being in whom lust was found—until after sin had entered. I am not now speaking of the law respecting Adam’s not eating the fruit, but of the law given by Moses (v. 19). Coming in at that time, it pronounced the curse upon every one “that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.” It took this ground.

And even the very notice in the scripture before us is remarkable. The apostle says, “for it is written” (v. 10), that is quoting Deuteronomy, where we find (chap. 27) that six tribes were to stand upon mount Gerizin, to bless the people; and six upon mount Ebal, to curse. But where the details are entered into, there are no tribes mentioned for blessing—the blessing is not heard at all; it is only the curse.

Again, “the law entered that the offence might abound” (not that sin might abound: God could not do anything that sin might abound), that is, that the sin already in man’s nature might become positively and definitely “transgression.” The law did not produce sin, but only manifested it. Let us look at what the apostle says in Romans 7, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good.” Again, we read in another place (I merely quote it now as regards its application to this part of the subject), “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law,” 1 Cor. 15:56. Directly the law bent down on the conscience, it proved man to be altogether wrong. Every thought that man had was detected, and the will refusing to submit, its acts became transgression, so that sin by the commandment became “exceeding sinful.” It produced moreover a great deal more lust in the heart than there was before.

We all know this to be the case. There is a familiar illustration of it constantly seen in our own houses.

Request your children not to do a certain thing: let it be only not to look into a box (no matter what), and you find that they all long to look into it. So it is with grown-up persons, they will perversely wish for the forbidden thing, and, what is more, though they may be ashamed of it—ashamed of the expression of it before men—the inclination is so great, that, if they could but do it and not be seen, they would not be satisfied until they had. Just so with the law.

And now, beloved friends, if that is what the law is, if all who are “of the works of the law are under the curse” — is that the law for me, to have any righteousness through, in the sight of God? Never; because the law acts on a nature which is already evil, and therefore it can do nothing but lead to the righteous judgment of God against all that is brought out in and from that nature.

What more could God do? (it is not the subject of this chapter, but I would just advert to it)—what more than give right directions, a revelation of what He required from man? There is another thing that He has done. He sent light into the world. This is something added, as it were, to the requirements of the law. The law cursed, but here (in Christ) was life shewing light to all around, and that man hated, because it proved his deeds to be evil. It was the adaptation of light to every possible state in which man’s nature could move. I am not speaking of communicating life; but take man in any condition, and he is without excuse.

Well, beloved, this is the effect of the law as revealed from God. It took up fallen man with the knowledge of good and evil, and did not touch the power he had to

meet its requirements, and therefore, necessarily, it brought the curse. The apostle reasons, “If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin,” v. 21, 22. Mark that word “all”: it leaves out none. It might be said, If you go and take a man without the ordinances of God, and put him under the law, the effect is known: but there are helps and ordinances; put a man with them under the law, and he can get life. That was precisely Israel’s case. It pleased God, in Israel, to test whether man could get the promises, if under the law with ordinances. It has been proved to the contrary. God says (Exodus 19), “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.” It was not until He had ransomed them out of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness as His “people,” that He gave them the law—not until He had brought them unto Himself. Then He says by Moses the mediator, “Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed,” etc. (v. 5). And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” The law was given on this ground. Then commenced the trial. And what was the consequence? Failure.

“The scripture hath concluded all under sin.” And that is what the gospel more fully brought out. The gospel supposes it. Man, no matter what you call him—a heathen, a Jew, or a Christian, with every ordinance you please—is man, and the Lord deals to man the “curse.” Man should be what man is not. And therefore that is what the law of God must do, and did. If God gives a law, can He give that law to suit sinners, or Himself? Is God

to come down to give the requirements such as would suit the sinner as a sinner?—and, if so, what sinner?—where would you draw the line?—to a heathen, who is corrupt in all his thoughts?—to a Jew, who looks merely to outward things? where can I find a man to whom I might adapt the law, if it is not to be what God requires? If God gives a law to sinners, He must give the full demand of His holiness. That is what the conscience of man recognises as fitting. There can be no intercourse between God and the sinner on the ground of what God requires, without His either sanctioning or condemning sin. Sanction it He cannot; therefore, and necessarily, all He has to do is to condemn. Law can never go beyond that. No matter what man is called, God deals with man as he really is. And now, what does the apostle put here in the stead of law? “Promise.” There he rests the hope of the soul. “Promise” was long before the law. All hangs upon the faithfulness of God. This is the reasoning. A mediator supposed two parties, God and man, and therefore failure, as it depends on the stability of both. Not so promise, as it depended on the stability of God only: “God is one.”

If I make you an unconditional promise, a simple promise, to-day, I have no right to say to you on the morrow, Oh you did not do so and so, and therefore the promise is nullified. Certainly not. No! you would reply, you promised me the thing unconditionally, not if I behaved well or ill; and therefore it is mine. These “promises “were made after sin came in, but before the giving of the law. Sin came in before ever “promise” was heard of. When Adam had failed in the garden, before anything was said to Adam of the foulest sin in his mind, after he had said, “the woman whom thou gavest to be

with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (he had not only committed sin in disobeying God's command, but he had dared to reproach God); before anything was said of that, as soon as the evil was traced up to its source, God, in pronouncing sentence on the serpent as the author of it, gave "promise." But He did not give "promise" to Adam in sin—to man in that condition (now the law was given to man in that condition), but in the last Adam. Before there was the slightest dealing on the ground of responsibility, "promise" was made in Christ, as the Second Man, the "Seed of the woman." Not a word of it was spoken to Adam personally, yet it was that on which his soul might rest, on which faith could lay hold.

Well, before the Second Man came, before He was revealed, the law was given to shew the effect and consequence of man's being under responsibility. "The law was added [came in by the bye] because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman [the seed came], made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

But there was another step, then, which was this: the promises made to Abraham and his seed (chap. 3:17) were confirmed of God in Christ. When Isaac had been offered up (in figure) and raised (in figure), God spake and said, "By myself have I sworn, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee… and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," Gen. 22. Now Isaac was not the true "seed," Christ, the true

“seed,” was typified by Isaac, in whose offering the promise was confirmed. “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ,” v. 16. The promises are settled on Isaac, after (in figure) he had died and risen again from the dead; and that is what the grace of God has done for us in Christ. Christ came here and lived, accomplishing in the face of Satan, all that the spiritual man could offer to God in his life. But “except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” Though Christ Himself, as man, might have had the promises, yet He could not have taken up anything with us except through death and resurrection. He could not have had connection with man in the old Adam. Well, He dies, and (having accomplished the work of redemption, done everything, set aside the consequences of responsibility for man, as risen from the dead, in the power of a new and endless life—” the seed “to whom the promises were made) He takes up these promises.

As men, we were under responsibility, and, therefore, under the curse, for we had sinned. Yes, though, through grace, able to say that we are “heirs according to the promise,” we had sinned. There was no difference in this respect between ourselves and any poor Jew or Gentile, we were all “by nature children of wrath, even as others,” “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” Eph. 2:3. The state of soul was the same. Perverseness of will was there—the determination to do our own will, and the pleasure of doing it, instead of the will of God.

Christ took all this upon Himself. He charged Himself with responsibility, instead of putting man under it. He

underwent, to the full, the last effect of sin, as the result of the wrath of God, and of the power of Satan, as well as of the weakness of man. He bore the curse. He went down into the grave. But He was still the “holy One,” and (though He might imputatively take sin) it was not possible that He could be holden of the cords of death. Therefore He rose again— head of a new family of men, a new world, a new creation— heir, according to the purposes of God, of all the promises, and heir for ever.

He has accomplished everything—all that was needed for the remission of our sins, and, besides that, broken the power of Satan under which man lay, in the very seat of that power. Through death He has “destroyed him that had the power of death,” Heb. 2. Most blessed truth! Christ has put Himself into the condition of man in death, the last stronghold in which Satan held man captive, by the judgment and under the sentence of God Himself. He rose out of it, and became the source of life, and heir for us of all the promises. Grace has found its way into death, and “out of the eater” has brought forth sweetness.

If we look at death, the Prince of life has tasted death; if, at the power of Satan, Christ has broken and destroyed his power; if, at the wrath of God, He has borne it all, drunk the cup to the very dregs. “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” “Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves,” Psalm 88:7.

But, further, He is the righteous inheritor of all the promises; as it is said, “All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen,” and we, through grace, can

add, “to the glory of God by us.” How then did we come in? As heirs together with Him in life—united to Him—one with Him. Our standing before God is in Christ—the Second Man, as having no more part in the flesh, though we have as yet to struggle against it. Death is abolished. Life and incorruptibility are brought to light by the gospel; and that, because the responsibility question has been settled in the death of Christ.

But it is “by faith.” How blessed this!—how true of God!—how blessed for us! By faith we receive all the promises in Christ. By faith we find everything done. It is only to believe. Faith produces all manner of fruit in us, there is wondrous power in it, but still it is only to believe: that is all. Just as though you had been deeply in debt, and some kind friend had paid the amount, and, when that was done, had sent you word. The person comes and tells you that your debts are paid, and you believe it. Now your believing produces joy, and gladness, doubtless, in your heart, but, of course, it does not in any measure go to liquidate the debt. So as to salvation, the debt has been paid, Christ has finished the work, and the believing soul enters into all the blessed results (v. 22). Faith is exercised upon that which has been already accomplished. “It is of faith, that it might be by grace, that the promise might be sure to all the seed.” Nothing redounds to the glory of the creature. It is a person simply depending upon the truth of God.

When the soul is made hopeless in itself (and this must always be the case when the conscience is really honest under the sense of responsibility), it turns to see what God is. The more the truth of God’s requirements is known, the more wretched that soul becomes. The, end of all is seen in that exclamation of the apostle, “O

wretched man," etc. I am a man, and therefore a wretched being, one having the curse resting upon me.

God, in the gospel, sees man wicked, miserable, rebellious, lost; but He sees him according to His infinite compassions. The Lord Jesus has begun altogether a new thing, not demanding what man is required to be before God, but accomplishing what God is towards man —grace. We find in Christ, it is true, and to perfection, what man is required to be before God; but more than that, what God is towards man. Grace came by Jesus Christ. So that the moment any person, let it be a convicted sinner, stood before Christ as to what he was, he found Christ to be grace. If he came as what he was not, Christ laid him bare; but, if he came as what he was, then no matter what he was, a poor helpless sinner, a wretched adulteress, or the thief upon the cross (that was not the question—the question was, what was Christ, who came not to judge, but to save), all was grace.

Having found Christ, we have found one who has all the promises of God. And, since He took those promises as a consequence of what He had done in putting away sin, there can be no further question about sin before God. Our sins are necessarily left outside, because Christ Himself has borne them all; as it is said, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He stood in our place, and took upon Himself our iniquity, and bore the judgment due to us—went down into the grave, but rose again from the dead in the power of a new and endless life, and ascended up on high, even unto the Father's presence, as our representative. There He stands—we stand there in Him; as He is before God, so are we, holy,

unblamable, and unreprovable in His sight, partakers of His life, joint-heirs with Him of all the promises.

This, beloved friends, is our position before God; this our standing in Christ. There is an entirely new headship in the second Adam. We are presented in a new character to God, such as man never had before—man without sin in the presence of God, the very pattern of God's mind and delight. We find difficulty, it may be, in apprehending it, because of the weakness of the flesh. The moment I look at myself, I have another man full of failure. But I stand there as having had sin for ever put away. The knowledge of this gives peace; and we worship. Make sin what you please, let it take what form it may, you cannot mingle the state of man under law with the condition of the new, the heavenly, man in heaven.

The Lord grant us to know what we are in His love.

The Church, An Habitation Of God Through The Spirit

Ephesians 2

There are two great ideas in this epistle as regards the saints. The grand thought all through it is the grace of God towards them; but, as regards the saints, there are these two ideas about the church: firstly, its hopes; secondly, what it is now meanwhile.

It is looked at, on the one hand, as having a certain place in glory, and as enjoying the inheritance; and, on the other, there is this second point, what it is even now before it gets there. And this last gives it, in a certain sense, a higher character of communion and fellowship in blessing than is contained in the glory itself which it expects, though doubtless the other will not then cease. You will see these two things in considering the prayers of the apostle (chaps, 1 and 3).

We shall be in glory before Him, as children (that is the expression), to bring out the glory of His grace, who had predestinated us according to the good pleasure of His will— “holy and without blame before him in love.” And here we have, “In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” —before Him in glory—and God dwelling in us.

We will just consider a little, beloved friends, how it is that the church becomes thus the “habitation of God.” It is of the deepest importance to us. I said that the blessings connected with this are in some respects superior to what might properly be called glory. And this is important, because we find that, even now, this

blessing is brought to us. In glory we shall be able to enjoy it better, but we have it now.

At the end of chapter 1, where the apostle has been speaking concerning God's purpose about the saints, the thought is the "exceeding greatness of his power," and he prays. See v. 17-23. At the close of chapter 3 we have a prayer founded upon the other point I have spoken of. See v. 14-21. The character of this prayer is higher, and it goes farther than the former. There are two titles given to God in this epistle. In the one He is called the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ," because Christ is looked at there as the glorified Man, who has been down here, suffered, died, and been raised again. In the other He is called the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," because Christ is not thus looked at as the risen and glorified man, but as the Son of God.

Now the prayer in chapter 1 is founded upon the first of these titles (v. 17), and is connected with the glory of the risen man. In chapter 3, the apostle bows his knees unto "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," and, therefore, he looks more at intimacy of communion, and to our being "filled to all the fulness of God." It is not God giving us knowledge of the inheritance, but God filling us with Himself.

We find these subjects, and the distinction between them, all through. In the one the Lord Jesus Christ is considered as man, whom God has raised from the dead, and there the church is looked at as "the fulness of him that filleth all in all"; in the other as the Son of the Father in the power and unity of that relationship, and so of the divine nature; this latter point being more

especially connected with our being “an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

There are two points in this expression, beloved friends: one, that of our being the “habitation of God”; and the other, that this is “through the Spirit.” He is not speaking of our dwelling with God (although that is true), but of our being “an habitation of God.” He says, “ye are builded together,” etc. And this is evidently a different thing. It is a different thing, our having glory together with Him, and God’s dwelling in us. This is, I repeat, evidently a most peculiar and special blessing.

God came down to talk with man (Gen. 3)—man already fallen; and “they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” But God then had no “habitation” on earth. God’s Spirit had dealt in power in various ways in the history of man; but the moment the people are called out, it is, “The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation,” etc. (Exod. 15:2.) This is the first thing we find in the song of Moses.

David had the same thought; 2 Sam. 7. He would not dwell in a house of cedar, whilst the ark of God dwelt within curtains. But the Lord answers him and says, “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.” “But Solomon built him a house.” Having settled His people in the land, the “habitation of God “was built—a carnal worldly temple, but it was the “habitation of God.” And then, when the Lord Jesus came into the world, this truth applied properly to His Person. He

says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He is regarded as the temple of God. Therefore God was then dwelling (in Him) with man, in the midst of the sorrow and evil into which man had fallen. Well, here it is the church (v. 22).

Beloved friends, it is touching to see the place which God takes (referring to the passage I have quoted about David’s thought of building a house), according to the state of His people. God always takes the place that suits His people: a marvellous thought, but a most gracious one on His part! If His people are enslaved under burdens as in Egypt, He becomes their redeemer. If they are a journeying people and in tents, He dwells there Himself. He takes the same place as His people, for He is to be the centre of their blessing, and leads them by the cloud. This He did up to Solomon’s time. When Joshua comes in and has to fight with the Canaanites, He presents Himself as “captain of the Lord’s host,” Josh. 5. When the people are settled (settled as far as they could be in their fleshly condition) under Solomon in fulness of peace and in blessing, God builds a settled house. And God dwells among them. Whatever the circumstances His people are in, God takes a place suited to them.

The place that God takes to dwell in now (until His people come into the rest) is, properly speaking, a tent or tabernacle. It is surely just as blessed, but, so to speak, more movable. In glory it will not be so. While we are on our journey, it is a tabernacle, not a temple, but still God dwells among men. His own grace has built “an habitation “for Himself. I am speaking, let us remember, not at all of that place of glory into which we are to

come before God, but of that other thing, that God will come and dwell down here upon the earth.

When Jesus was in the world, God's presence was there. And it was that which was the centre of all blessing. They gathered around Him. Well now, it is the same thing with regard to the church; God dwells upon the earth in the church, as a "habitation," though not visibly, not in manifested glory. And this comes to be of the last possible importance. If it is really true, that God dwells on the earth in a "habitation," evidently the "habitation "wherein He dwells must be of the greatest importance. And this remains always true. Failure though there may be, still the church is His dwelling-place. Until Christ came, or, at any rate, until Lo-ammi was pronounced upon Israel at the Babylonish captivity, God dwelt there, and the blessing of the people and the guilt of the people were in respect of God's dwelling. If it was a question of idolatry, "they have set (He says) their altars by my altar." So when He is going to judge the people in Ezekiel, He goes on, and shews the prophet what they were doing in the temple. It might be the ancients of the house of Israel in the chambers of imagery; or women weeping for Tammuz; or the men at the door of the temple of the Lord between the porch and the altar, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, worshipping the sun; but it was in the temple. This was the place to which sin referred itself. Having stated this general truth, I would now just see here how this "habitation "is brought about.

All the first chapter of the epistle, as also the beginning of the second, is taken up with the other point of which I spoke, that is, that God has raised up Christ from the dead; as it is said, "according to the working of his

mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when," etc. God is here in power stepping in (not merely a judge having satisfaction, but in His own power stepping in for the accomplishment of His purposes) to deal with man looked at as under the consequences of sin. It is not only man in evil that is looked at in this epistle, responsible to God, and having to find that which meets his state in the cross (we see that in Hebrews, and elsewhere, it is not specially treated of here), but it is God acting in His own power (when man was on this ground—in utter ruin) for the deliverance of man. Christ takes this place. He descends into the lower parts of the earth, making Himself responsible for the consequences of sin. He descends into the whole consequences of sin—He comes down from the throne of God in the perfectness of divine love, humbles Himself, takes upon Him, and comes down into, the consequences of sin, where man had brought himself.

Marvellous and blessed truth! Where we were looked at as sinners, "dead in trespasses and sins," Christ has come down—and put Himself there. Alas! the judgment of those who reject Christ! they will find the full consequences of sin in themselves. But that is where faith first sees the full consequence of sin—in Christ. Sin was fully matured (man had behaved lawlessly without law—the law had been broken —Christ slighted and rejected); and He then enters into this place, and goes under the full power of the consequences of sin. We see Him brought down into the weakness of man under the power of death—Satan's power (though He could not be holden of it), and under the wrath of God, into "the dust of death."

All that which the heart of Christ felt and suffered is told out wonderfully in the Psalms: whether it be from the hiding of God's countenance, or from His enemies surrounding Him, or from Satan's power, or from God's waves and billows going over Him, all is freely expressed there. Occasionally we find this breaking forth in the gospels, but it is more especially given in the Psalms. What the gospels present to us, generally speaking, is the perfect walk of Christ—of Him, who, by virtue of His living by the Father, and His perfect obedience and love, was always towards man, what man needed in order to approach God; man could see all that, while His thoughts about that which pressed upon Him were hidden within His own heart. "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished! "Constantly His soul was straitened, whilst, if you look at Him among men, they were not straitened in Him; all was grace and love still. He shewed forth che great principle of the offering up of Himself as man to God. He had power to take that place, and He took it. Though without sin, He suffered all the consequences of sin, even to "the dust of death"; He went down into it. But there He could not remain.

Having thus perfectly glorified God, it then became a question what God should do for Him. And we read, "He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places," etc. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Having descended, in the perfectness of love and obedience, to the dust qf death, He went thence back to the throne of God and is set above all. And thus, whatever exercise of heart there may be, or whatever the evil and rebellion of

unconverted man, faith knows perfectly that from the throne of God down to the uttermost consequences of sin, and from the uttermost consequences of sin up to the throne of God, Christ fills all things. There is not one thing to the eye of faith, from the throne of God to the dust of death, and from that up to the highest point of glory, that is not filled with the redemption power of Christ. The love of God has come down into the place of the sin and ruin of man; and faith rests in that love, and in the full accomplishment of redemption, as shewn out in that He who went down into the dust of death is now at the right hand of the throne of God. “He that descended,” etc. Woe be to those who reject this! but that is what faith knows about the work of Christ. He has gone down into the dust of death, and the “exceeding greatness “of God’s power has raised him from the dead; chap, 1:19, 20.

That is the redemption power of God. The results, it is true, will be brought out afterwards; God is waiting, and souls are being gathered unto Christ; but that is the redemption in the power of which we stand.

Well, now, the consequence of that is seen in the second chapter: “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins”; and then too (because God has done it for us in Christ), He “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The great result of this salvation will be our being with Christ in the glory by and by; but even now, by faith, we can see ourselves “in Christ Jesus” (not “with” Him, as has been observed) there. I know that the redemption power which has visited me touched me, and has taken me up, when I was “dead in trespasses and sins.” I know that this has not stopped short of the

throne of God itself. It has united me to Him who is at the right hand of God, and has therefore placed me there “in “Him, as having the same life, the same righteousness (God’s righteousness now), and hereafter the same joy, and the same glory.

This would have been true if there were but one saint. But there is a further thing. The apostle goes on to shew that, looked at according to the largeness of the purpose of God, Jew and Gentile (whatever the distinction between them, and that of God, “in the flesh”) were on one broad platform of ruin— “among whom we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh,” etc. Having taken that ground, he says, “remember” where you are— “He is our peace,” etc. (See v. 11-17.) “Peace” having been made, the dealings of God with man down here on the ground of redemption are begun. Christ sat down on the throne of God, having completed the work—the peace being made— redemption accomplished. He could not go farther than the throne of God. He has carried the “wave-sheaf,” the first-fruits of redemption-power in His own Person up to the throne of God.

Well, on this the “peace” that is “preached” is based. And here I would just for a moment (supposing there may be some here who have not peace) notice how it is that He preaches peace. He does not come and say to man, You have to make your peace with God. He preaches peace. He does not preach a peace to be made —a peace that is not made. He preaches peace, a made peace. He has “made peace through the blood of his cross,” having sat down at the right hand of God, the whole work being accomplished, so that He is “expecting until his enemies are made his footstool,”

Heb. 10. He comes to Jew and Gentile, no matter to whom, and preaches peace— not a progressive work, but a peace completely made. The soul may be a long while struggling under the sense of unanswered responsibility, it may cling to the law, it may mistake the work of the Spirit for the work of Christ, be looking for results in itself (we naturally look to our own righteousness, and even the saints often mistake holiness for the ground of peace), and the like: all that may take place in the soul, but it does not at all touch the perfectness of the work of Christ, or alter the strain of what Christ preaches as being at the right hand of God. Blessed thought! It is simple enough, and there is nothing more suitable. For, as we shall see (without the thought of holiness having anything to do with the ground of peace), holiness flows forth as the consequence of peace. Wherever there is simplicity of faith, there is peace. That is the first point—perfect peace, independent of anything in ourselves. No matter what we were, Jew or Gentile, sinners or honourable in the earth, it is a peace that has been brought to us in Christ. The next thing (and that as a consequence) is, that "through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father," v. 18.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners," etc. (v. 19-22). Christ, having wrought this redemption, having ascended to God, having sat down at the right hand of God, having gathered us together, makes us, thus gathered together, "an habitation of God through the Spirit." It is not God merely acting in certain men; it is God dwelling in the church down here, as gathered through the word of the gospel. The church is the place of God's presence on the earth. He has set

us in redemption, and He comes and dwells in us. When the church was gathered together with one accord in one place, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down and dwelt there, the result of the accomplished work of Jesus. And this is a real thing. I am not speaking now merely of gifts, but of the presence of God Himself.

Now it is quite clear that the presence of God down here must be of the last importance. His “habitation” is that which He possesses, which belongs to Him, and nothing that does not recognise the fulness of this blessed cost of salvation, can be. It is those who are His redeemed ones, brought together by the peace which Christ preaches, those who have, through Christ, access by one Spirit unto the Father, that come to be the place where God dwells.

There are many places in which the Spirit of God could act. We find the expression, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him,” 2 Chron. 16:9. If we turn to certain dealings of God as assuring the work He established by His Spirit, for instance the laying the foundation of the temple by Zerubbabel (Zech. 3, 4), we there find mention of these “eyes of the Lord.” So in Ezekiel’s throne (chap. 1:18; chap. 10:12), the operations of God in His governing power in the world. See, too, Revelation 5:6. All this is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God. It might act in glorious power, or it might act in silent energy, but in all it is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God going out and dealing in the world, and is quite another thing. I am not speaking of that. We are “an habitation of God through the Spirit,” in grace to us: it may be a tabernacle, but still it is “an habitation of

God" — the place where He dwells, where He lives, so to speak, where He has taken up His abode, where He can have around Him the things that suit His presence, that in which He delights. Beloved friends, this is what we are; we may have dishonoured it, but that is just what we are made, and in this world—the place where God dwells.

Now to take a simple example of the effect of this (I said a simple example, and yet it is a very important one), let us look at the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). That was not a question of gift. Peter said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" God was there; there was no gift exercised at all; and Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead. They had had the folly and madness not to understand that God was there, and therefore, when they came and brought only part of the price of the possession, lying to God (it was not to Peter and John they were lying), God shewed the indignation of His presence, and they fell down dead. There was wonderful effect in this: we read, "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things," etc. The fact was known that God did "in very deed (as Solomon speaks at the dedication of the temple) dwell with men." It was the real presence of God— the church was there, having God dwelling in it, and acting in it, by the Holy Ghost—and He proved it; His presence sanctified the place.

Well now, beloved friends, that is always and constantly true. As I have said, we may have grieved the Spirit, dishonoured the house, and been unfaithful (that alas! is also too true), but it depends upon the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. What is the consequence of redemption? It is not merely that I have peace

individually, nor yet that we are heirs together of glory, nor yet that we have access through Christ by the Spirit to the Father; besides all this, it is the ground on which God dwells down here. It is in virtue of the accomplishment of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ that God can come down here, and make His "habitation," that He can comfort and strengthen those who are within (not merely act in providential power without), that He can be at home in the midst of His people. This, His being at home in the midst of His people, practically sanctifies us; it involves great responsibility: His house should be according to His holiness. "Holiness becometh thy house for ever." But, at the same time, it becomes the source of our power and blessing.

Suppose, for a moment, God was here, and we were all His saints (the Lord grant it may be so!) and all the saints of God that are in the world were here (which is not the case, God forbid that it should be!) is it not quite evident that the eye, the ear, all would refer to that, that every movement would be consequent upon God's being there, the presence of God governing and stamping its character on the whole? Again, if that were the case, supposing we could say that God was there, and all the enemies in the world were raging about us, beloved, would not the one thought be, that God was there, and that it was God's concern? He would be the strength, the help, the confidence of the soul. Yes, and that was so beautifully shewn when the Jews came back to Jerusalem, and were in fear of their enemies. The first thing they built was— what?—a high wall? No, they built an altar. God was their confidence and strength.

Well, we are “builded together for an habitation of God.” And see what a blessed truth is connected with this. On what ground could God come into our midst and dwell with us? It is not on any uncertain ground. It is upon the ground of God’s perfect and entire complacency in the church—His perfect delight. It is not God’s coming down to call us, as He did Adam after the fall, in order to find out that he was lost. Neither is it God’s coming down, as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah, to see whether the cry that has gone up is such as it seems to be. Neither is it God’s coming down, as He did to Israel, to put to the test whether He can stay. He comes down on the ground, and in consequence of, completed redemption—of peace being perfectly made. His presence is the witness and evidence of accomplished redemption. He says, as it were, I have so accomplished this redemption, I am so pleased with you, so satisfied because of Jesus, that I am come to dwell with you, to make My abode with you: you are to be My “habitation.” What a character does this give to the church! What manner of men ought we to be?

But then there is another thing. If we are the “habitation of God through the Spirit,” the consequence is, not merely the favour of God, but all the consequences of this favour. The Holy Ghost comes down as the witness and testimony of the fulness of the Father’s delight in Christ and of our joy in Him. “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come,” etc. (John 16:13-15). He ministers (I am not now talking of the instruments) to us these things. He has all “the goods (as it is expressed of Eliezer, Gen. 24) in his hand,” to minister the comfort and strength of what belongs to us as the bride of Christ, the true Isaac, unto whom the Father hath given

all that He hath. And that is the case in the midst of infinite difficulty and trials (in that sense more blessed than if there were none). This is one of the present special blessings of redemption, one that we shall not know or want in glory; we shall have the full result of redemption there. But it is not merely to be brought into glory, to be at home in perfect peace in the presence of God and with God. Redemption is so perfect, that, before we get into glory, God by His Spirit can come and dwell with us here, in the midst of our weakness, and because of our need.

As the apostle speaks in the Philippians, “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Paul was tried, persecuted, taken as a prisoner to Rome, and they were going on preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds, etc. Well, all this, he says, will “turn to my salvation,” etc. His soul thus being fed and nourished by the Spirit, everything in which he found trial and exercise of heart became but the means really of working out of him that which was contrary to God, in order that his sympathy might have free course, and his soul joy only in Christ.

Again, beloved friends, in speaking of the sympathy of the Spirit of God with the saints, and in the saints amidst a groaning creation (Rom. 8), he says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities,” etc. (v. 26). Here I find the Holy Ghost taking notice of certain trials, sorrows, weaknesses, difficulties, and the like, of everything, in short, that can press upon the heart of the

saint, and that even when it “cannot be uttered,” and “groaning” is its only expression. It is the groaning of the Spirit of God in such a poor feeble heart, that it does not know how to express it. But it is said, “And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth,” etc. (v. 27). That is what He has found there— “the mind of the Spirit.” It is not merely that human feelings are brought out, but that the things (the very trials and sorrows) that would have produced human feelings, have now produced, if I may so say, divine feelings—feelings “according to God,” which go up to God, and which God can answer; so that they become the means by which He pours into the heart all the fulness of His consolation, not perhaps taking them away, but shewing that He Himself is the sufficient blessing of the soul, because He dwells with it, and makes Himself the portion of it. Now if we look at the way in which this meets us where we are, and what we are, this is how it works. He comes down into all our circumstances, and, for a poor trifle of affliction, I get to find (not the thing set aside, but) God Himself taking the place of our sorrow.

In the prayer in chapter 3 the apostle loses himself, as it were, and no wonder. After he has said, “I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he adds, “that he would grant you, accofding to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love [that is what God is—the divine nature], may be able to comprehend with all saints [taking in the whole unity in which the Holy Ghost dwells], what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” —he has now got into the infinitude of all God’s thoughts and purposes of blessing, and he

cannot say of what. Just as the groanings could not be uttered, so the thought cannot be uttered. It is God that has come in, and Christ fills all things according to the power of redemption, from the throne of God, down to the dust of death, and from the dust of death up to the throne of God. Having all things, and filling all things (he says), here I am placed, in the midst of this infinitude. And then he adds, “and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” He could go to no place, but there he found infinite love and infinite power —the love that brought Christ down, and the power that took Christ up again.

This meets all the exercises of the heart. If brought down, even (as Christ came down) into the dust of death, the Holy Ghost comes down to the poor man, who feels this power of death in his soul, and dwells in him, and carries him up, by the knowledge of redemption, into all the fulness of God Himself.

Well, that, beloved, is the result of the dwelling of the Holy Ghost down here, consequent upon redemption accomplished by Christ. The Holy Ghost can come and bring peace to our souls, and the effect of that peace to our souls is to make us pass through all the evil around “according to the power of God.” When the apostle speaks to Timothy, he says, “Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”

Where shall we stop? The soul rejoices in that which must be the joy and gladness of the heart which knows God has gome down to dwell in it, the immutable blessedness of God’s presence. Then, whatever the circumstances in which we are placed, if they be only those of sorrow and trial, what is the consequence? God

ministers of the fulness of the sympathy of His love to our souls; and thus they become, so to speak, as a door, or a chink, to let in God. All the riches, “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” are ours. And Christ fills everything. There is not anything we can think of, but we find there of the fulness of Christ. If we think of death, we see Christ there—of sin, we do not know what sin is fully until we see Christ “made sin” —of God, it is only in Christ we can know God—of man, it is only in Christ we can see man raised to the height of his blessing—of peace, it is through Christ we know the peace of God—of life, Christ is our life— of glory, it is all in Christ. There is not anything, no matter what we think of, whether in creation, or above it, or between God and man, but we must think of Christ in it all. He is the “head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” We can turn our thoughts to no one thing in which we do not find the fulness of Christ; and by the power of the Holy Ghost our souls are brought into the joy of this fulness, as that to which we are, through living union with Him, everlastingly and perfectly united.

There is another point which I have not touched upon, the practical effect of this. What would the effect be on our souls, if we really felt we were “builded together” etc.? if we felt that, in the whole world, Christians were in truth the dwelling-place of God? What a thought should we have to act upon as to everything! That by which the church of God has been corrupted, ordinances and the like, would disappear as clouds before the presence of the sun. And what thoughts of glory should we have—what thoughts of holiness —what peace as to practical circumstances—what jealousy of grieving the

Holy Ghost—what love toward all saints—what joy—what confidence! How we should (not in pride, but in the sense that God was there) mock at all our enemies (Isaiah 37:22, 23)—how live and act among men, as "sons" and "heirs" of God! What power for everything, in short, would be ours, if we remembered the completeness, the peace-giving completeness, of redemption, and could really say, that God was dwelling with us!

This is our portion, and whatever our weakness and infirmity (and alas! it is very great), whatever our failure, still it remains true. We may grieve the Spirit, we may weaken the consciousness of our joy, but still God is with us. The Holy Spirit dwells among us.

May the Lord give us to know and to own what this presence of God in the earth, and that with men, is by reason of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus!

Carnal Confidence, And The Confidence Of Faith

Numbers 17; and 18:1

“Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying? “When the children of Israel cried thus unto Moses, the feeling they expressed was not exactly dread of an unknown God—that which the sinner has naturally on his conscience when first awakened, but a dread resulting from haughtiness of spirit, the flesh having intruded itself into the presence of God. And this is what is constantly found where there has been a high bearing before God. The consequence of God shewing Himself to one in this state of soul is to cast him down into despair. The fear of the natural conscience when first awakened, on the other hand, though painful, most painful, is still salutary.

When there has been a going on altogether without God, I do not call this a high bearing before God, though it is so in another sense. We all know how many people go on carelessly, day after day, and year after year, without troubling themselves about God, seeking joy and pleasure in the world, sunk in listlessness, oppressed with cares, or engrossed with business: a thousand things fill and occupy the natural heart to the exclusion of God. Sometimes it does cross the conscience that there is a,God, but, so far from His being the object of their life, He is not their object at all— “God is not in all their thoughts.” There may be these secret misgivings (God often works thus in the hearts of those whom He afterwards calls to Himself, although not producing fruit

through it at the time); and, when the soul is converted, the remembrance of such appeals aids in bringing to a consciousness of the total and entire perverseness of the will of man. Where there is open and notorious sin, it is an easier thing to reach the conscience, just as the Lord said to the Pharisees, the religious people of the day, “The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.” Often, in the course of a comparatively blameless life, there have been these calls, and God, in the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, has been despised.

When conviction of sin comes, when the Spirit of God sets a man in consequence in God’s presence, he finds out both what he has been doing, and what he is. He finds out that he has been treasuring up unto himself “wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”; and more than this, he finds out also that his natural condition is a condition of sin and rebellion against God, and that he cannot remedy it. Now, whilst this state of soul is ever painful (and it often drives a man nearly to despair), it is salutary, a blessed thing. Wherever there is a clear sense of our position, there is to desire to go to God, though with the consciousness of having no title to be there. Just as with the poor prodigal— “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” So also with Peter, at the feet of Jesus— “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” There is this consciousness of unworthiness before God because of having recognised His holiness, and that He ought to be holy; but there is also the desire to go to Him—a seeming inconsistency, but that which is

really of the Spirit of God. It is very natural, where the Spirit works, to desire to go to God, because we feel He is needed by us, although conscience says we are unfit to be there. The heart is turned to God; it sees His holiness, sees that He ought to be holy, and so takes God's part against itself. There is no desire that He should be less holy, that it might, so to speak, slip into heaven; and therefore it justifies God, instead of seeking to condemn Him that it may justify itself—that which many a poor sinner does, that which Adam did when he said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." Instead of justifying self, there is the justifying God and condemning self. Thus the heart is set right. It has not yet, it is true, learned redemption—what God has done for it in Christ; it is occupied with its state before God as a present thing, but this is salutary. There is not the peace that God does give and will give; still the heart is set right.

In grace God had raised up priesthood to meet the need of His people. But there was assumption on the part of these Israelites, that, because they were His people, they could take a place before Him otherwise than on His ground. They had abused the privileges conferred upon them—murmured against God—made the golden calf—said it was better to go back to Egypt—despised the promises; there had been a long course of failure and rebellion, and at last it rises up to what is called the "gainsaying of Core." Whilst in this fleshly state, they assume that they can draw nigh to God. "And they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then

lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (See chap. 16). Here is haughtiness in the presence of God. And this is very apt to creep into our hearts—a taking up in the flesh the privileges of the children of God. It may not be manifested in the gross aspect of this scene; but is there not often the feeling of being able to come near to God because it is our privilege to do so? Now it is clearly our privilege, the privilege of all saints; but it is a sad thing if as a consequence of that nearness, when the soul has got out of His presence, it goes on haughtily and carelessly, still talking about its nearness.

We find another instance of haughtiness in the presence of God, in the case of Cain (Gen. 4). When God said to Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" he replied, "I know not: am I my brother's keeper?" answering God flippantly. But the moment God shewed Himself as God, saying, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground, and now art thou cursed from the earth," in came despair. Wherever there is haughtiness of heart before God, and God shews Himself, there is despair; the language of the heart is, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish." We get here a great principle: even in the man who is a Christian, there is no realised ground of confidence, and the heart sinks down in despair.

A Christian has always the ground of being perfectly happy before God, because he is perfectly saved. This is the right state of a Christian—that of confidence, not in the flesh (carnal confidence), but confidence and joy before God. A state of want of confidence and of uncertainty as regards himself is a state in which the Christian may be found; he may pass through it, and

that even because of a certain work produced on the soul by the Holy Ghost, but it is not his proper state. What the Holy Ghost gives is certainty. Wherever there is uncertainty, it results from the working of our own hearts, even though in connection with (and, in a sense, grounded upon) what is really the work of the Spirit. I may believe that God is holy, and seeing sin in myself, may begin to reason on my own worthiness, as to whether I can, or cannot, come to God; whether I can have anything to say to God. There may be the desire to go to Him, but then I do not know whether He will accept me. This is not faith; and yet it is constantly the state of soul in which Christians are found. It is not properly a Christian state; it is reasoning upon things known by faith, things found out through faith, but it is not faith. We find in the word of God, that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin—that by the blood of the cross He has made peace—that our sins and iniquities are remembered no more—and, if faith is in exercise, we are happy, we get peace. Faith is the simple-hearted reception of what God has said.

Unbelief is not a Christian state. It is, alas! that into which the Christian may fall, but it is not a Christian state. Uncertainty cannot be therefore recognised as a proper position of the soul, admitting that it may pass through it, and indeed, that it generally does. But then Christian certainty is certainty in, and not out of, God's presence. Inasmuch as it is certainty founded on faith in what He has said, it is always certainty in His presence. Faith is at rest there. All else that comforts, strengthens, gives us liberty in what we do in the world, is based on what we are in the presence of God. The blood is placed there—on the mercy-seat—in God's sight; and therefore,

because we know this, we can say that we are justified from all things, that it is impossible God can impute sin to us. The blood is under His eye, and not our sins.

But there is quite a different state of soul from this, a confidence out of God's presence. The soul may think and reason about the ground of Christian confidence, and Christian privilege, just as did these Israelites that they were owned of God. Theirs was a carnal confidence. It was just the taking up of general principles of truth as to God's dealings with His people, and then going on in fleshly assumption. This brought them to murmur and rebel. They came up with confidence that the Lord was with them; but the Lord gave directions respecting Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and interfered in judgment upon their ungodliness. And then we read, "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses, and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord," (v. 41).

Now what is the remedy of the Lord for this? He sets up priesthood, as the only ground on which He can go on with them. He says, as it were, 'I must have clear and plain evidence what My power is, in order to make cease from Me the murmurings of the children of Israel; but then, if I give this evidence of My power, it must be in grace; to deal with them on any other ground than that of grace would be for destruction.' And such must always be the case. If the Lord were simply to come by the power of His actual presence, it would bring confusion into the soul. Sometimes we see this on a death-bed for a little moment. In what the Lord thus does in bringing the soul into His presence, He puts it

under a shade of the power of that which Christ went through—just a shade of it.

The truth is, that, in the way in which many believers are occupied in daily life, they little realise the presence of God. It is not that they have not peace, but that they never fully estimate what the flesh is before God. One learns this from intercourse with Christians, and specially with those who have been long Christians. They know very little what it is to find themselves face to face with God. They may have been awakened under convictions of sin (perhaps terrible convictions), and have got peace to their souls; but since that there may have been the going on comfortably with certain things, without a realising of the presence of God, so that if it were to come on them, they too would be "consumed" with terror. It is well for us to remember that certainty as to salvation is the proper, the normal state of a Christian. I repeat this here, just to shew that what I am now saying is not meant to deny it at all; but still I say that if God were to meet such persons, real Christians though they were, in the present power of what He is as God, it would produce trouble and distress. This ought not so to be. It is quite clear that, if it is the case, we are not really living in His presence, and that is the place where we are privileged to be. There is a constant tendency in our hearts, when out of it, to be taken up with certain things that are grounded upon what is truly our relationship to God, and to carry on these things without realising His presence. Now, if confidence goes along with this, it is a most hardening thing. Confidence, I repeat, ought always to be the portion of the believer—the confidence of faith. God does not withdraw this, but we may lose it. Whilst there is a going on with

confidence, and we are not walking in the presence of God, the conscience not being sincere, there exists that which is mining the very foundation. We may go on in joy, but if that joy is not joy in the presence of God, there will be a breakdown some time.

Now that is what I mean by “carnal confidence” —not the confidence of an unconverted person: there is that, but I do not mean it: I mean the confidence of one whose peace and hopes are rightly based, but maintained without walking in the presence of God. It is a right peace, right hopes, a thing rightly founded, that which is really his own (the proper condition of a Christian is always to have it); but still it assumes a carnal character in the heart when it is carried on without God; that is, when it is not continued in by walking in His presence. The consequence is, that the moment the Lord appears, no matter in what way, let it even be in grace. His presence comes to be terrible. These people had not realised the power of it in God’s presence, and therefore they broke down in despair, and said, “Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish.”

Now I do not say that it will come to this point in our hearts, but (the same thing in principle) it will be for discouragement, for loss of confidence, and for distrust of God. Suppose you, a real Christian, had been going on in carelessness, and carrying this carnal confidence along with it; and one were to speak to you even of the intercession of Jesus, if there was a sense of God’s presence through this to your soul, it would not be a cheering and strengthening but rather a discouraging thing, and the soul would break down. Our place with the Lord is to walk with joy, but it is joy in the Lord. Enoch “walked with God.” Can you say you are walking

with God? I do not ask if you are doing that which is openly wrong; but would the presence of God alarm and distress you? Our confidence, if we have any, is a fleshly thing, when that is the case.

Do not rest in such a condition: it is not what God has called us to. He is all grace, grace to us according to our need; but it is with Him, and in His presence, that we find and enjoy His grace. Moses sang (Exod. 15:13), "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed. Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." And that is what He has done for us. He has brought us home to Himself. And what then? He has put His Spirit into our hearts, that it may be our home. You know what it is to be at home: we act so differently there—no other place is like it. We are at home when the Spirit is working in our hearts, giving the joy of our portion in the presence of God. We may have to go forth into the world to labour, to exercise ourselves, and to be engaged in a thousand different ways; but when we get back again, how great the change! We only go out to come back. There we are at home. How comforting, how establishing the thought! It is a terrible thing to be saying, instead of this, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish; whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die" —when God's presence, in the place of being the home of our hearts, is terror and distress. I have no doubt, that you will find hundreds of Christians, who, instead of feeling away from home when they have got out of God's presence, are at ease. But it is, I repeat, a terrible thing, not merely because it is a wrong thing, but because God is grace. We are called to be "at home" with God. The Lord Jesus Christ, when about to go back to heaven, said

to Mary, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God.” We ought to be as much “at home” in spirit there as He. Was it not with joy, with confidence, that Jesus said He was going to the presence of His Father? He came forth from God’s presence to act in love in the midst of this ruined world, and He went back when He had finished the work that had been given Him to do. And was it not, in a certain sense, with the feeling of going home? But He says, “unto my Father and your Father; to my God and your God.” What a blessed thought! That is the church’s place; we are called to be “at home” with our God and our Father—to the blessedness of His house. No matter what the world may be, we should be there at home—happy home!—as truly there in spirit, and as happy there, as Christ.

If that is what is given us in Christ (and God gives nothing less), do our souls realise it? We may be measuring fitness, but God cannot measure fitness. If He receive at all, it is for Christ’s sake; our title is based upon what Christ has done. We may be going through many an experience; but God does not rest on our experience. Nay, He has not to do, in that sense, without experience at all. If He receive us, it is for Christ’s sake, it is as Christ, it is all Christ. It can be nothing less, and nothing short of that. Having adverted to this, let us now turn to God’s answer.

After all the murmurings of the people, after the rebellion and gainsaying of Korah, this is the manner in which the Lord takes away the murmurings, by priesthood in grace. ‘I must conduct them’ (He says) ‘by Aaron’s rod (not by the rod of Moses) to Canaan. This people have not only been found in bondage in Egypt,

but in rebellion and sin in the wilderness; and therefore the only way in which I can deal with them is by priesthood.' There is no possible hope of leading us up into the heavenly Canaan except we are. put under the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore it is said that Christ is a "Son over his own house."

It is "his house"; that is the first thing. How does He deal with it? Suppose we find a house that is not ours to be a bad, dirty house, we may bear with it—not so if it is our own house. The way that Christ deals with that which is His house (it is His interest, so to speak, to do so) is to have it clean. We are put under the priesthood of Christ; this is God's arrangement for the purpose of dealing with sin in the "house." "If any man sin," a Christian man: what then? He is guilty and gets condemned? No such thing. That would be the reasoning of the heart where there had been "carnal confidence"; it would get alarmed and uneasy, and say, "We die, we perish," but what is the truth? "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The sin sets Christ to work; that is the effect of it, not to leave it there (of that we are quite sure), but on the same principle that, if we find uncleanness in our house, it would not make us reject the house but get rid of the uncleanness, so Christ is occupied in love in removing the sin. It is the priesthood of Christ that leads us up into the heavenly city.

But the next thing to be noticed is, we are priests in God's house, and the thing therefore which we have to bear is the iniquity of the house. "And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou, and thy sons, and thy father's house with thee, shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your

priesthood." This is true of all the church. We are God's sanctuary—"the house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). So of the individual saint, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). It was not allowed to have anything defiled in the camp, much less in the "sanctuary." We are brought now to dwell in the sanctuary of God—to minister in the priesthood of God. This involves responsibility. Thus have we to judge about sin; and not as though we were under law. This is where God has brought us—the position in which we stand towards God, and what we have to bear. It is no matter of attainment or of maturity in Christ: you may have been converted yesterday, or you may be a "father" in Christ, and therefore able to understand it better; but that does not affect the question: there might have been a young priest or an old priest in the sanctuary, but the young priest would have to bear the iniquity of the sanctuary and of the priesthood, as much as the old one—as much as Aaron himself.

God, in the riches of His grace, has made us His "sanctuary;" our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost; we are priests in His house; and iniquity must therefore be judged accordingly. If the sense of this does not produce joy in our hearts, we cannot be on our right ground. If we do not know what it is to be in the sanctuary of God, we do not know what it is to be a Christian. I do not say we are not Christians, but we do not know what it is to be a Christian. If we do not know what it is to be priests unto God, we have never yet got into our proper place before God.

There is another remark. Suppose we have, through grace, the consciousness of being priests, I ask, Is there not, as a necessary consequence of this (not the feeling, “Behold, we die, we perish,” but that which takes the place of it), holy confidence, confidence before God? He says, I will not deal with those who come into my house as a judge, as though they were under law; it is “you and your sons,” etc. If God has people in His house, He will have them there as priests. If we are saying, “Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die,” we have got back under law. We are listening to the reasoning of our own hearts, and that is not faith. The moment we begin to reason thus, we are under law; faith is not in exercise, and therefore we must be under law. This “Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die” —is all law. Now what is the Lord’s word, or rather what is the silence of His word about it? It does not know such a man as the one who is saying this: his doing so is just a proof that he is not a “priest” at all. He does not know what righteousness is, in coming into the presence of God; he does not know what grace is; he will neither come into the house, nor perish —he is not in a condition to do either.

If the Spirit of God is working in the heart, He produces a sense of dread in bringing out of that condition: but if we then distrust God, we shall never get into His presence on that ground. There is no answer to us, except that we are in a wrong and untrue condition altogether. God may bring us out of it, but He does not own us in it. Let us remember that it was “carnal confidence “that had produced, as we have seen, the

feeling here; and it may be that the same thing is working in our hearts. Where there is “carnal confidence,” it takes us from under the consciousness of grace, and puts us for the time under the power of law. Nothing meets us there, nothing can meet the case, no, not even the intercession of Christ.

To conclude: we are brought, through wondrous grace, into the sanctuary of God, we are made priests unto God; and that is the way in which we are to judge of good and evil. We are always to judge of good or evil, according to the condition in which a man is; we do not expect our servants to be sons; neither our sons to be servants. And if we are merely judging of good and of evil according to natural conscience, we are not going on Christian ground at all. This is the question we have to ask ourselves: What is it that becomes a man who is God’s temple? what is it that becomes a man who is God’s priest?

Do we shrink from being set in this responsibility? If we cannot say that we like to be there, or that we have such an interest in God’s glory that we desire it, if we are speaking about our weakness, we have not the confidence of grace; we are saying in a little degree, “Behold, we die, we perish.” It is the same thing in principle: I speak not of the extent of it. Why is it that we are thus afraid? Just because our hearts are not strong in the full and simple confidence of grace—present grace: as it is said, “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.” Though Christ has died and put away our sin, yet we have not full confidence in God’s grace, we think He is not all grace; that is what is meant

by the “present grace.” God loves us with the most perfect love; He cannot deal with us on any other ground; He loves us at this moment, just as much as when He gave Christ to die for our sins. He is love, and nothing else, to us. He is not double-hearted. What we are standing in is grace. When the soul is confident of that, ‘O now’ (it says) ‘let me have this holiness, let me enjoy this holiness of the sanctuary.’ If it is all grace, it does not say “we die, we perish.” How can we die, where all is grace?

What we want is the full blessed, clear apprehension that we stand in grace. Our hearts will then have joy and courage. That which will enable us to act aright is, not what we have called carnal confidence, the going on in the common-place joy of certain truths, but the certainty and joy of God’s presence. Do we know God’s presence as the practical home of our hearts? Oh what joy is there in this! Of one thing be sure: coming to Him in the name of Jesus, you will find it to be the real, blessed, secure home of your hearts.

For ever blessed be His name, He has said, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

The Marriage Supper Of The King’s Son

Matthew 21:23 to chap. 22:14

If all things were not entirely out of course, every principle of human nature astray from God, there would be no need for all the painstaking on the part of God of which we read in these chapters (and that after all with such strange results), no need of these, in one sense, sorrowful and assiduous efforts to call people back unto Himself. We might have supposed, as we sometimes see in the case of a self-willed child, that the moment the father’s voice of love and entreaty was heard, instant obedience would be produced, because a sense of relationship was there. But no; these constant efforts, this “changing of the voice” (as Paul has it), serve but to shew that all sense of relationship between man and God is gone. That voice touches no spring, there is not a chord upon which He can act—the echo of the heart is gone. Where there is the appearance of an answer, it is but hypocrisy. I am not saying that God cannot change the heart, but that there is entire alienation of the heart from God. The Lord in these chapters goes through these various efforts and their result in a very full and distinct manner indeed, both as regards the responsibility of man and the actings of His own grace; and He does it in the simplest way by appealing to man’s conscience just as he is.

We read, “And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?” (v.

23). God comes into the world to do good, and man asks by what authority God does good in the world! Jesus had been shewing His power previously (v. 12-14), but now He was quietly teaching in the temple. They were vexed to see the veil of hypocrisy drawn aside, and the finger of God put forth in the cleansing of the temple from these things by means of which they had made it a house of merchandise, and therefore they ask Him this question. The Lord appeals to no miracle—He has done plenty, but He appeals not to miracles. "Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it; from heaven or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? [for John bore testimony to Jesus]. But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people: for all hold John as a prophet" (v. 24-26). That is, He at once, by means of the question which in divine wisdom He puts to them in reply, brings out the real state of their conscience. "And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things" (v. 27).

Thus, at the very outset, He puts this great truth before all, that the conscience of man is bad in not submitting to the righteousness of God. And that is the case always. Man cannot deny that things come from heaven, but he will not believe. If pressed to the utmost (look at the extreme case of infidelity), men love darkness rather than light, just as it is said, "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind," etc. (Rom. 1).

Having laid down this in direct application to their own conscience, He could now tell them that which follows, “But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him” (v. 28-32).

In this first parable the Lord puts a case according to the difference there is between formal righteousness and the repentant sinner; between the person who goes through the world decently, desiring to make a fair appearance, and the one who, acting against all the dictates of natural conscience, sins wilfully, and then repents.

In the second son we have that which is descriptive of the general character of (decent’ people. They go on quietly and in outward order, professing to own the will of God, and to serve God; they say, “I go, sir,” but after all, from morning to night, and from night to morning, they are occupied in doing their own will and nothing else.

In the other son there was the positive delight in doing his own will (just, alas! the description of the wilfulness of the human heart: he said, “I will not”), delight in

breaking through all righteousness as it regarded the relationship between himself and his father, but withal the consciousness of this, and the owning afterwards that it had been broken through (not merely that he had done a wrong thing, but that he had disobeyed the father), and repentance on account of it.

There was no regard in the self-righteous Jew, with all his profession, for the righteousness of God; but the publicans and the harlots believed John. Now there was no regard in the former for the ordinances of God; in the latter there was no regard for the common decencies of life, but when they heard the ministry of John, who came in the way of righteousness, they repented; and this repentance, touching the root of all sin, referred itself, not merely to acts of sin, but towards the Person sinned against. The one decently owned God, and left it there. The others indecently and outrageously sinned against God, but "repented, and went." They recognised not merely certain particular faults, sins in conduct, but sin against God, that they had failed in rendering that which was due to God. We see then that the only repentance which God owns is that in which there is the recognition of sin, and the recognition of Himself as the One against whom we have sinned. The state that the publicans and harlots were in brought them to this certainty, that if God spoke, they had nothing to say for themselves, there was nothing which they could do, except indeed to put their hand, as Job says, upon their mouth, and say, "I am vile." And this they did, whilst the scribes and Pharisees remained as insensible as possible, not only to God's word, but also to the full operation of God's grace; they were as insensible to it as if there had been no such

thing. This is the first part, the first case of God's dealings with man, brought before us by our Lord here.

We next get certain dealings on the ground of responsibility, then dealings on the ground of grace: the one in the latter part of chapter 21, the other in the early part of chapter 22. First, as to responsibility the Lord says," Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it" (v. 33, 34). It is quite clear that this applies to the Jewish people in the first place; yet as to the general principle of the parable it is true of all who have heard the name of Christ and have refused to believe in Him. It is not merely a case of relationship, as between a son and a father (that we have seen before), but it contains an appeal to the conscience of persons on the ground of certain things God has done. It was God that had planted the vineyard, hedged it round about, digged the winepress in it, built the tower, let it out to husbandmen. He had put this vineyard into the hands of certain persons, and having done much for it (everything that He had done for the Jews, as we see in Isaiah 5:2, almost in the same words), He naturally looked that it should bring forth grapes to Him. So it is, as to the general principle, in Christianity. It is not a question of natural conscience merely; God had let something out to husbandmen. This was a new thing. He did not leave men to the light of their natural conscience. He had taken the greatest possible pains with them, done everything, so that He says, "What could have been

done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? and then, putting them on the ground of responsibility, He comes looking for fruit. We shall see just now that God has abandoned this ground. He produces fruit, but He has abandoned the ground of seeking for fruit.

God had done everything possible for the Jewish people as His vineyard, and then the thing that He naturally looked for from them was that they should bring forth grapes. He sent the prophets first (the way the prophets are looked at here is, that they were seeking fruit), “and the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son,” v. 35, 37. We find Christ Himself taking them up upon this ground. He came (though not as to ultimate result or purpose) to seek for fruit in His vineyard (it is not a question of grace), and having come to seek fruit, they say, We will get rid of this Son. “When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him,” v. 38, 39. The end of responsibility, and of all this patient dealing of God with the Jewish people on that ground was, that they were glad of the occasion to kill the Heir, in order that they might seize upon the inheritance. “When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men,” etc. (v. 40, 41).

Here then again we mark this great principle, that in whatever way God looks for a response from man He

finds none. There is such a thing as God's looking for fruit from that which He has planted and nurtured in the world, but there is no fruit to be had from man towards God. The husbandmen's will was entirely against it. They did not recognise the authority of God in His vineyard: they liked to have it for themselves. The will was entirely and absolutely wrong. The truth was, the husbandmen were opposed to the planter of the vineyard, and therefore the relationship was not owned, etc. The effect of the ordinances God had given was only that of bringing out the enmity and hatred of those to whom He had entrusted His vineyard. The Lord ends this part of man's history with the question of seeking fruit and finding none. He places man in a certain religious position, giving him many external advantages, and looks consequently for fruit.

Now, beloved friends, there are many hearts looking at that as their position: the ground they are dealing upon with God is that of seeking to return fruit. They feel that God has given them certain spiritual advantages, opportunities of hearing, and the like, and that therefore they ought to return fruit to Him. And so they ought. But then, although such are not in a condition of soul answerable to that of the husbandmen who killed the heir, they have mistaken, and that altogether, the ground on which God is dealing. And it does not stop here, for the soul may even deal with Christ Himself as with one who is seeking fruit, just as much as with the law and the prophets. It sees in the perfectness of Christ a claim, in the love of God a claim. It thinks that if God has so loved as to give His Son, if Christ has so loved as to shed His blood, there must be this claim of fruit from it to God. Most truly there is, in one sense, but claim does

not produce fruit. Surely there must be fruit found in every believer; but if we stand before God on the ground of having to meet His claim, it is all over with us. It is a very different thing whether there is the claim of fruit, or whether fruit is produced through the work of the Spirit on the soul.

And further I would say, that where there is honesty and sincerity of heart, and the conscience is touched with the testimony to the love of God, seeing the infinite greatness of that love as manifested in the Son of God having come down from heaven to die upon the cross, in the way of claim the only effect is to make it say, Well, it is all over with me if there is no return! And so it is all over with it on that ground. I repeat, the soul sees the love, but it sees also the infinite claim that that love has upon it, and therefore that all is over with it, and it feels no hope. All this is upon the ground that God is claiming fruit. There is the sense of God's amazing love in giving His Son to death for sinners; the soul sees His graciousness in this, and feels that it ought, in return for this love, to produce the fruit that God is looking for, but that it does not; consequently all this exercise of soul ends in nothing but the sense of deserved condemnation and judgment. Claim on a person always results in judgment to that person, if he is unable to meet it. If God is dealing with us in the way of claim against us, the result of that is to bring us in guilty in not having answered at all to the claim which God has against us. We have made of the love of God in Christ a severer and more terrible law than that given by Moses, when the soul puts itself under claim to that love; and therefore we feel condemned and get into despondency. The Lord has tried man by the law, and it has ended in nothing but

judgment. The more you elevate the claim of God, the more you elevate your own condemnation. If you put the love of God in the place of law, the greater the love that has been manifested, the more guilty are you in rejecting the claims of that love.

In the beginning of the next chapter the whole thing is changed. It is not claim at all: God is presented as dealing on different ground altogether. “And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come,” v. 1-3. True, they would not come; but it is not at all the presenting of certain claims on the conscience of men. It is something the king is doing and inviting to. He tells them that he is going to glorify his son, and therefore that he must have around the marriage-table of his son all that which would make the marriage glorious and blessed—what is suited to the glory of that son. It is all grace. How clear that everything in a case like this comes from the person who makes the feast. There could be evidently no such thought as that of the guests invited having to provide the entertainment. Why, it would be an insult to the king. There can be consequently no thought of claim here, or of the allowance even of the guests bringing anything towards the feast, neither the thought of a suitable return on the part of those invited. Everything is done on the part of him that invites; and, I repeat, all such other thoughts would be a positive insult.

This parable then brings before us, not the question of God’s dealing with the natural conscience of man, neither that of the owner of the vineyard looking for and

not receiving fruit (the Lord has closed that altogether with the last chapter), but that of the king acting according to the riches of his own house in order to glorify his son.

This was the very thought of the king in preparing the supper. Was it merely that he was going to make certain people comfortable? No; it was about his son. And in order to glorify that son he must have full blessing at the table—what shall I say? happy faces around it, hearts without one care, without any shade of anxiety upon them, free from every suspicion of his love. The "marriage" of his son must be honoured in having all these things accompanying it.

The application of the parable is as simple as possible: and that is the ground on which God is dealing in the gospel, and not as claiming fruit. I do not say He does not produce fruit, but it is not a ground of claim in any shape. Man has failed altogether, not only in not producing fruit, but also in not owning the claim which God has upon him; and if he does own the claim, he gets into despair on account of it. I have put that case. But now all this is over, entirely over, and God is set forth as glorifying Himself in having others made happy around His Son.

If I speak one word, or have a thought about claim, in connection with the ground of my standing in the presence of God (though I admit the principle most fully), it destroys the whole ground upon which God is acting in the fulness of His grace. It is quite clear that one who had allowed for a moment the thought of having to provide his share of the feast could have no real sense of the honour of the person who invited him

to the feast (the man who had brought it would have been kept at the door); there would have been the entire undervaluing both of him who had made the supper, and of the supper.

And it is also true, moreover, that if a guest who had been invited by the king were a rich man, and sought to come in in costly raiment of his own providing, or, on the other hand, a poor man, who attempted to wear his ragged garments, it would in either case have been an insult to the king, a despising both of the “robe” provided and of the thing invited to. He who invites to the wedding is the only one who can provide the guests with a garment suited to the occasion. All is entirely set aside, both as to the thought of our capacity (because of anything we are in ourselves), to come in, and as to the fear of our state shutting us out. Our blessing depends on one single thing, the sufficiency and the grace of him who invites.

“Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city,” v. 4-7. Here again we get a notice of the manner of God’s patience, and also an evidence of what the heart of man is. Just as the Lord had taken them up (the Jews) before on the ground of God’s claim to fruit through the ministry of the prophets, and by His Son, so now He takes them up on this other ground of the

invitation to the “marriage supper,” “and they made light of it.”

“All things are ready” (that is, there is nothing more to be done); this was specially the message when the apostles went out after the crucifixion. The feast was ready. The principle of man’s heart is seen, not only in despising the claim, but in slighting the grace of God, and in killing His witnesses. The carelessness that would make a sinner despise the king’s grace is exactly the same thing in principle that would make him kill the Son. “They went their own way,” both in one case and in the other.

But then we have this blessed truth: God did not give up one particle of the fulness of His love, or of the blessedness of His purpose as regards His Son. He is dealing upon this ground, I must have people around me, and blessed there; I must have the “marriage” of my Son honourable. Yes; God, so to speak, must have His house filled. “Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests,” v. 8-10. Now there is the present going forth of the gospel into the world—the great character of the gospel.

The first principle is the full outflowing of grace, the activity of God’s love going out into the world and bringing in to partake of the blessings which Himself has provided. His love goes out in simple grace to find “good and bad,” as it is said, to partake of the goodness

of His house. That is the principle God is acting on in the gospel. It is quite clear that He provides everything. He is not claiming fruit but providing blessing.

“And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how earnest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” v. 11-13. Here we find a sad fact: not the principle of God’s dealing, but a fact. One case is sufficient to shew the principle. The “wedding garment” was there, the provision for the guests’ blessing made by the King. He takes notice of all present, and Christ was not possessed by this individual. The only effect of his being there was to make it more distinct than ever, to prove the more, that he had nothing to do with the “wedding,” for he had not on the “wedding garment.” He might have had the most splendid garment; but whether his raiment was splendid and costly, or the vilest rags in the country, those of the poorest beggar, it mattered not—it was not the “wedding garment.”

If our souls are not in the spirit of the “wedding for his Son,” there is a clear proof that our hearts have not entered into that which God is doing. There is the principle of the whole matter in the question, “How earnest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? “He has given up the ground of claim in dealing with us; He is asking for nothing; and more than that, He will receive nothing from us. We cannot pretend to go and carry Him anything; if we do, we insult Him.

Have our souls entered, beloved friends, into God's great thought? He is thinking about His Son; His heart is set on glorifying His Son, and that by the joy of those who are brought in to the "wedding." A soul not in the spirit of the "wedding," the nearer it might be to the Son, the more in company of those seated at the table, the more manifestly would it be seen that it had nothing to do with being there. Were the guests at this table merely for the purpose of feasting? Surely not. They were there for the wedding of the Son, and to do Him honour. Unless our thoughts and spirits are clothed with Christ, the nearer we be, the more evident would it appear that we have nothing to do with that feast. To be there, and present at the table, we must be able to enter into the one thought that is governing (so to speak) God Himself in all His counsels; and this is the glory of His own blessed Son.

In going to a wedding, the man who only thought of the feast would not have entered into the spirit of the thing; and the man who took something towards the entertainment would but insult the maker of the feast: nobody wanted anything of him. The effect of understanding rightly that God is glorifying His Son Jesus is to make us put aside every thought but that. Let us be the most vile and wretched sinners in ourselves (as Paul says, "of whom I am chief"), all anxiety will be taken from our hearts, everything of uneasiness, and uncertainty, because the invitation is there. And it is God that provides for all in the house "the wedding garment," a robe suited to His own presence. Supposing the king's invitation had come to some poor man clothed in rags, should he have said, Oh! that cannot be for me; I am a poor man! That was the king's affair; or, I cannot

enter the king's palace as I am; my garments are not fit for his presence! no matter. That, I say, was the king's affair, and it was the king who had invited him. He would go on the king's invitation the moment he believed it; for the only thing that was necessary to fit him for a seat at the marriage table was that which the king himself had provided, and he would count on the king for it.

Beloved friends, that is all we have to do. "They which were bidden were not worthy"; but the house must be filled. Surely we shall daily learn more of the blessings connected with the King's house, and we shall count it blessed to be there; but the whole affair is, God is glorifying His Son Jesus, and we have nothing to do but to rejoice in His grace. It is He who has thought of the "wedding" for His Son, who has thought also of the dress of the guests (providing everything needful to fit the guests for their presence at it); and we have nothing to do but to have done with ourselves, and to think of the worthiness of Him who has invited us.

Our title to be at the feast is the invitation of Him that is glorifying His grace in the "marriage" for His Son. What an unworthy feeling for one instant to call this in question! He gave His Son; He sent His Son into the place of our sin and misery to bear that wrath upon the cross which was due to us; He has raised Him again from the dead. What do you fear? Are you hesitating about your own worthiness, saying, Oh, but my state of soul is not such as befits one who is called to the marriage supper of the King's Son! No matter, in that sense, what the state of your own soul is; "they gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good." No matter, if invited by the King, whether the invitation

meets you in the “highways” as a beggar, or as a prince, so to speak. What is it you are doubting about? Has God made a mistake in inviting you? Surely you are not worthy to be before the King; but He has called you without expecting to find any worthiness in you; He knew what your unworthiness of heart was before He called you.

He is calling sinners by a love that has been proved stronger than death. The Son of God went down into the dust of death for sinners, the Son of God went down under the power of Satan (though He could not be holden of it) for sinners, the Son of God went down under the power of the wrath of God for sinners. What more could have been done? Christ is risen again, and is alive at the right hand of God. “All things are ready; come unto the marriage!”

God invites on the ground of what has been done, and not on that of anything yet to be done. The only question we have to ask ourselves is, whether or not our hearts have submitted to His righteousness. Surely what He gives is that which produces fruit. When at the “marriage supper,” the King desires that cares and sins and anxieties should be all forgotten j He will have around His Son happy faces, hearts free from distrust and free from doubt. Everything can be forgotten, save that we are there. If you see this, beloved friends, I do ask you, Are your souls happy? Do your faces shine with gladness now, as those who know that their place is to sit around that table?

God’s heart is set upon the glory of Christ in connection with the joy and blessing of those whose hearts have submitted to His righteousness, and He has provided for

it. If your hearts are occupied with the glory of Christ, you will not be thinking in one sense of what you are, or of what you were; your thoughts will dwell upon the blessings into which you are brought through grace, of which Christ is the source and the centre in the presence of God.

Wilderness Grace

Exodus 17

Those who are familiar with the study of this part of scripture will remember that the history of Israel from the Red Sea to Sinai (that is, from the time of their deliverance out of Egypt until they placed themselves under law) contains an exceedingly remarkable testimony to the grace of God.

At Sinai Israel took up the promises of God on the condition of their own obedience, and then their entire failure was manifested. But up to that moment all God's dealings with them had been in grace. Though there was continual murmuring and unbelief and disobedience, He did not chasten for these things as afterwards, when they had taken a stand before Him on the ground of obedience. It was an immense transition in their history.

The law "came in "as it were (though of course it was perfect in itself) "by the bye," between the promises and the accomplishment of the promises, to shew what the condition of man would be if he stood on his own ground before God. The law was not before the promises, the apostle argues (Gal. 3), "that it should make the promise of none effect." Promise was given first. And "He to whom the promises were made" came after the law. Meanwhile the law entered in order to manifest what man was, and the effect that would be produced on man when placed on the ground of obedience to the known will of God.1 It was needful to do this, because of the constant tendency of the heart to put itself under law, in spite of repeated failures; not that God's promises of grace were not simple and clear, but because of this

natural tendency of the heart of man. Supposing my conscience to be awakened, I must know that it is my duty (that I ought) to please and obey God. The effect of this naturally is that I expect God would accept me on this condition. Till a man is brought to feel his really lost state, this is very natural. It is quite too late to talk of pleasing and obeying God when we know ourselves to be lost sinners.

Now God, who is wonderfully painstaking with us for our blessing, sent the law, in order that this tendency of man's heart, and his utter worthlessness, might be shewn out, and proved to man.2 But before He did this, He had made known abounding grace, pure grace, flowing from His own thoughts and purposes, without any reference to the feelings of man about Him, or any condition of man's obedience.

So that those whose hearts were opened to believe the promises could rest in peace upon them all the while they were learning more of their own sinfulness through the law. The very starting point of all God's dealings with us is pure grace, suitable to sinners, whose state He knows, and therefore knows how to meet.

There was no promise given to Adam before he fell. He needed none; he was happy in his innocence and then present condition. And after he had sinned, the promise given was not made to rest on anything in him. The Lord came down to the garden, saying, "Adam, where art thou?" that he might be made to feel what the condition was into which sin had plunged him: and he answered, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." The Lord did not give a promise to Adam (for He could not, in the state of

sin in which he was, without dealing lightly with sin; neither could He leave Adam without promise, unless He cast him into remediless despair). What God does is to bring in “the seed of the woman” —the second Adam. There was not a word of promise to Adam personally: the promise was made to the “seed of the woman” in pronouncing the curse on the serpent— “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” This was a promise for Adam, one on which his soul might rest, one faith could lay hold of —no promise to Adam in his sin, but a promise of blessing in and to Christ. And it appears that through grace Adam did rest on this interference of God, for he afterwards speaks of Eve as “the mother of all living.”

This was developed onwards and onwards till we come to the history of Abraham; where it is revealed still more definitely: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Isaac was only the type of Christ. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” Thus Christ was the Seed to whom the promise was made; Gal. 3. “All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen,” and we, through grace, can now add, “unto the glory of God by us.”

The promises were not only made to Abraham (Gen. 12) and to his seed, but confirmed to the seed through resurrection (Gen. 22). This was shewn in Abraham’s being commanded to offer up Isaac, and his receiving of him again from the dead “in a figure” (as the apostle speaks, Heb. 11). Christ takes the promises, not as on earth incarnate, but as risen from the dead. Without His death and resurrection we could have had no part in

them, for God cannot bless people in sin. “What concord hath Christ with Belial?” It is impossible that there could be communion between God and the sinner in his sins. If the Lord Jesus had not died and become the source of a new life to the sinner, we could have had no portion with Him in these promises. After the resurrection of Isaac there was a confirmation to the seed of the promises made to Abraham. “By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven … and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” This is referred to by the Spirit in the Epistle to the Galatians.

As to blessing, unless we speak of the presumption of our own thoughts about sin, we must look to Christ in reference to it. All the blessing is Christ’s; it belongs to Him; and to us only as having our portion in and with Him. It all rests on promise, without any reference to the state of man. Our strength and comfort is in seeing this, that it flows down from God as the expression of His thoughts towards us. Just as water reaching a thirsty man, the water has only to do with the thirsty man as it regards quenching his thirst; it does not come from, but merely to, him.

There was then the sentence of punishment pronounced on the serpent, and the promise given to the Seed. All is of grace, and in Christ.

The Lord having settled this great basis of truth, that all is of grace in Christ, and established in resurrection, He began to manifest His ways more in detail; and that first, amongst His own people Israel, the seed of Abraham

after the flesh. He began to shew, not merely His grace in giving His promises to the Seed, on which faith might lay hold, but His own considerate love in caring for the need and sorrows of His people. When once it was completely settled that the promises came simply from God and from His love, then He shews that He can consider all the need of His people, and take every possible thought about them and their sorrows, saying to Moses (chap. 3), “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and 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; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them,” etc. He took notice of every circumstance of their trouble and sorrow.

Having sent this message to them by the hand of Moses, that He knew their sorrows, and having touched their heart in this way, giving them confidence in His love in spite of their sinfulness, so that “the people believed, and bowed their head and worshipped,” He does not pass over their sin. He cannot help seeing their evil; and if He is to have them in communion with Himself He must take notice of their condition towards Himself as well as towards Pharaoh; that is to say, that of being sinners. God and sin must be always at variance: we ourselves feel it to be so. When quickened and convinced of sin, the first expression of our hearts, like

that of Peter's,3 is "Depart from me, for I am sinful man, O Lord." We see at once, as he did, that God's holiness cannot, ought not, to allow of sin. There is always great ignorance in us when we say this, though it is a very true feeling; for it is as though we thought that the Lord did not know a great deal more of what is in our hearts than we do ourselves. A moment's consideration in the case of Peter would have made him feel, The Lord knew that I was a sinful man before He came into my ship; and yet He came: surely then I need not shrink from Him.

The Lord gives us confidence in Himself by taking the start of us about the knowledge of our sinfulness. Jesus said to Peter, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" —planting him at once in confidence in Himself, because shewing him that though He knew quite well he was a sinner, yet His purpose was to make him the means of saving sinners. It was as much as to say, You need not shrink from me; for if I could not meet you in grace and put away your sin, I could not of course make use of you to save others.

In bringing Israel into direct fellowship with Himself, God shewed, by putting the blood on their doorposts (chap. 12), that when He executed judgment on Egypt He secured deliverance from it to His people. And just so in God's dealings with us; the judgment that has passed on Christ because of sin is the security of the church (of every believer) against judgment. When the soul apprehends the Lord Jesus as the one offering for sin, it has confidence in God; and that on the very ground of His knowing thoroughly our sinfulness. It is impossible that God should pass over the blood of the Lord Jesus, and impute to sinners those sins which He

has washed away. He cannot impute sin to a believer without condemning the value of His blood-shedding, and virtually denying the efficacy of it. And if that be true when He judges men by-and-by, it must be true now. Faith knows that death is God's own sentence against sin, and that it has been executed on Christ in the sinner's stead. Faith "sets to its seal that God is true," and receives His thoughts who has said about the blood-shedding of Jesus, "When I see the blood, I will pass over."

But there is another thing: it is not merely that God says, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people, I know their sorrows," etc.; there must be also His power put forth in delivering. This is shewn in the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea (chap. 14), and to us in the Lord Jesus having "through death destroyed him that had the power of death," Heb. 2:14. In the cross Satan put forth all his power and energy against the Prince of life; and he did it successfully, arraying both Jew and Gentile against Him (it was "your hour and the power of darkness," Luke 22:53); but in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the mightiest power of Satan was destroyed for ever. And so with Israel; God had taken up the cause of His people. It was not merely that He had given them peace through the blood sprinkled on their doorposts, but He Himself had entered into conflict with their enemies, and Satan's power in enslaving them was completely gone. We may have been brought to see the sinfulness and evil of our condition before God, and the power of the blood of Jesus in satisfying the holiness of God; but we do not know liberty till we see God for us in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

What was the effect of deliverance to Israel? and what is the effect of our deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh (Satan looked at as such)? To bring into the wilderness, and not at once into Canaan. Being in the wilderness implies all sorts of trials. It may seem strange to sight, that they who had just been singing the song of triumph and deliverance (chap 15) should be allowed to be three days in the wilderness without water; and then, when they came to water, should find it so bitter that they could not drink of it. But God permits these trials, in order that we may see our own need and prove His faithfulness. From the Red Sea to Sinai Israel proved the grace which belongs to us now. Let us ever remember, when speaking of the wilderness, that though there is trial in it, and plenty of trial, it is the place of the ministration of grace. The Lord's previous dealings were, as I may say, preliminary: He brought Israel into the wilderness in order to have them quite alone with Himself, that He might teach them what He was; as He said afterwards, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself," chap. 19:4. He lets us pass through these trials that we may thoroughly understand that all is from God there. The eagle's wing never tires or fails. It is either the most blessed triumph, security, and victory, that we enjoy, or it is nothing. It is wonderful how our hearts cling, not only to the thought of our own righteousness, but to the practical denial of our not having any strength in ourselves. Many have peace in Jesus, who do not see so entirely that they have no strength, either for service or conflict. Well, they learn it in the wilderness. Our journey through the wilderness is the weaning us from trusting in ourselves, in order that we may trust only in God.

The first thing God taught Israel in the wilderness was, that they could not get a drop of water except He gave it to them. They were kept without it three days; and when they came to water at last (when there was something within reach that man seemed able to grasp), they could not drink of it, it was so bitter; until the Lord shewed Moses a tree to cast into the waters, which made them sweet. The Lord causes that which was death to become the means of life, as Hezekiah says, “O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit,” Isa. 38. In death to the flesh there is life to the spirit.

In chapter 16 the Israelites want bread and begin to murmur again. The Lord deals with them in grace and gives them bread. But it was such bread as shewed them, morning by morning, that they must depend on Him. Had He withheld the manna one day, they would have had nothing to eat, for they could not keep it till the morrow; “it bred worms, and stank.” The Lord will not allow us to lay up anything (no, not even grace) in store that would tend to lead us into independence of Himself: it will turn to evil if we do. He shewed His people perpetual grace in His dealings towards them; but He never took them, nor can He ever take us, out of the condition of dependence on Himself. The manna was the type of Christ; as the water was of the Spirit.

Soon after (chapter 17), in journeying from the wilderness of Sin, we find the Israelites murmuring again because they had no water. “Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink.” But new murmurings only bring out fresh grace (for they had not yet come to Sinai): God gave them water. His grace abounded where their sin

abounded. The more they murmured, the more in one sense they got.

I would just remark in passing, that it is sin not to have confidence in the Lord, not to be quite sure that He will help us, whatever the need may be, when we are walking in His ways. It is recorded of the children of Israel as sin, that they tempted the Lord in that which they said here, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” (v. 7). When we are going on wickedly and wilfully, and say, “Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us” (Mic. 3:11), this is quite a different thing. Our God will indeed be with us, if His children, even then; but to chasten us. Whenever there is real need in the wilderness, it is sin to doubt whether God will help us or not. If we are not as sure of water in the midst of the sandy desert as though we saw rivers of water running through the country, we are tempting God.

This is the force of that expression of our Lord to Satan, “It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” Satan wanted Jesus to try by an experiment whether God would be as good as His word. Had He done so, it would have implied a doubt. His answer was, “It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” Tempting the Lord is doubting the supply of His goodness in giving us all that we need.

The supply of water and of manna to the Israelites did not take them out of trouble. They drank and were refreshed: there was the gathering up a little strength, and then Amalek comes and fights against them. It was but the preparation for conflict. So those who feed on Christ as the manna, and have in their souls the well of

water springing up into everlasting life, have still the wilderness and conflict with Amalek.

In that sense we have to do with Satan, though we are entirely dehvered from his bondage. We are never more under the power of Satan, as Israel was under the power of Pharaoh. (If Israel binds itself to Amalek, it is its own fault.) It is said to us, “Sin shall not have the dominion over you; for ye are not under law, but under grace.” But we have to fight with Amalek though delivered from Pharaoh. When we have been brought into the wilderness, and fed and refreshed through this grace, Christian conflict begins. We are called, like the Lord Jesus, never to doubt the Father’s love; but was He out of conflict? No, it was just the very thing that set Him in it. The being delivered from the bondage of Satan, and the being ranged on the Lord’s side, is that which brings us into conflict; and in this the Lord never lets us be taken out of dependence on Himself. The moment we forget this we shall be overcome. Satan can never make us his slaves again, but we may be beaten and wounded by him. In every detail of our lives there is no blessing but in dependence on God. Whenever self-dependence comes in, whenever our own wills are working, there is failure. If in speaking to you now I were to cease from depending on the Lord in doing it, all blessing to my own soul would cease. “Without me ye can do nothing,” John 15:5. Neither can I speak, nor you hear, to profit without dependence on Him. If a Christian gets out of dependence on the Lord, he will be beaten by Satan in conflict. Yet we ought not merely not to be beaten by Satan, but ever to be gaining ground upon him. Whether it be in winning souls to Christ, or whether it be in making progress truly ourselves in knowledge, or in

holiness, or in love, we are gaining ground on Satan's possessions. We have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. As Satan takes possession of my heart by ignorance, then every step I make in the knowledge of God is gain on the possession of Satan. He uses our flesh too; so that to mortify and keep the flesh in death is gaining ground upon him. But every inch must be won, every bit of knowledge gained, by conflict. In this conflict we are directly and hourly cast in dependence upon God.

God did not put Amalek out of the way of Israel—they must fight with him: and it is just so with us. "And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand," v. 9. This is very different from what we get in chapter 14, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

See what the Lord had said to Moses concerning Israel (chap. 3:8); that He would "bring them up out of the land of Egypt unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." Now where are they brought? Into the wilderness, to thirst for water, and to fight with Amalek! They had not reckoned on this (v. 3). And thus it is often with the saints of God; when they have had joy, and have sung the song of triumph, in being delivered from the power of Satan, they are afterwards astonished at finding themselves not in Canaan but in the wilderness. Jeremiah found the Lord's word the joy and rejoicing of his heart (Jer. 15:16), yet afterwards he was so discouraged that he says, "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived": of course this is only a strong expression of sorrow, "thou art

stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name," etc. (Jer. 20). When the saint finds what the road is, he is apt to forget the end, where there will be fulness of joy and blessing. The Lord desires to purge out that which would hinder our blessing and keep us from having our hearts and hopes set upon the end, and to humble us.

Moses,4 Aaron, and Hur go up to the top of the hill, and Israel under Joshua fights in the plain below with Amalek (v. 10). They fought the Lord's battle: but it is not sufficient even to be fighting the Lord's battle unless the Lord stretches forth His hand to help them. Otherwise "Amalek prevailed." Israel might have reasoned on the manner of their fighting, on the strength of the enemy, and on ten thousand things; but after all, their success depended on Moses' hands being stretched out. It is very hard for us to see ourselves and Satan to be as nothing, and God to be everything. The moment we get out of dependence on God, we find out our own weakness; though we have this comfort, that under whatever circumstances, through the priesthood and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, our blessing is substantially maintained for us, and this until the going down of the sun. "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side;

and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun," v. 11, 12. Enemies were as nothing when Israel had the power of God with them. The day is won—" Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi (i.e., Jehovah my banner): for he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation," v. 14-16. I dare say many of us have thought, when we have seen the necessity of dependence on the Lord, that one good battle with Satan, and all will be over; but no such thing, we have security and the certainty of victory, but no promise of cessation from conflict whilst in the wilderness. God has promised that He "will bruise Satan under our feet shortly"; as He said to Israel that He would "utterly put out the name of Amalek from under heaven"; but still "Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Till Christ comes, and Satan will be bound, and we shall have the full result of victory, we must reckon on conflict (not on slavery to Pharaoh, but on war with Amalek), but with the comfort of knowing that it is Jehovah who makes war, though it is through Israel, and Israel therefore has to fight. It is the Lord's battle against Satan— there is our comfort, but still a battle which we have to carry on; hence we are kept in an unceasing state of dependence. The moment it was not so, Israel were put to the worse.

As it regards the accusations of Satan, the blood on the doorposts is the eternal answer to that. As to slavery to

Satan, the Lord Jesus has delivered us from that; we have stood, the living ones, on the other side of the Red Sea; and we “shall see “Pharaoh and his host “no more again for ever.” What we find in the desert is, grace, conflict and the Lord having war with Amalek from generation to generation. We are to be kept, moment by moment, in a state of dependence, yet reckoning on the constant grace and help of God. There is not blessing and joy and comfort where there is not dependence on the Lord exercised. It is not enough for victory that in the battle we have ranged ourselves on the Lord’s side. You will find the tendency of the flesh, whether in praying or preaching or anything else, is to get out of dependence on God. We may be saying true things in prayer or in testimony; but if we are not realising our dependence on the Lord, we shall not have His strength in the battle; and the Lord must make us learn our dependence on Him, through weakness, and failure, and defeat, because we have refused to learn it in the joy and confidence of communion with Himself.

Victory is turned to worship in the scene before us. “And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi— the Lord is my banner.” When victory does not tend to worship, we and God part company as soon as the victory is achieved. How sad to see victory often leading to mere joy, instead of still greater dependence on, and delight in, God!

May we trace out, in all these paths of His wondrous ways, still more and more of the depths of His divine love!

1 “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.” These words (the response of the people with

one voice, when Moses had taken the book of the covenant and read in their audience, Exod. 24) were the complete confounding of two very distinct principles, which man has been continually mistaking and confounding since the fall of Adam—responsibility and power. Man is responsible to keep the law perfectly, but by the fall he has lost the power. This the natural heart cannot understand. One man denies his responsibility, and another assumes his power; grace, and this only, puts a man right on both points.

2 See Romans 3:19.

3 See Luke 5.

4 Moses held in his hand “the rod of God” —the symbol of the power of God, that which had worked the defeat and destruction of Pharaoh.

The Passage Of The Red Sea

Hebrews 11:23-29

We have in these verses a little picture drawn by the Spirit of God, of the ways of God in bringing up His people out of Egypt, by the hand of Moses. And we may say it is just a picture of the deliverance of the church from the power of Satan, of the salvation of God and the means by which it is brought about.

Verse 23: God had taken the tenderest care of Moses in his infancy. So in the days of our natural estate, God's care has been over us in a thousand ways.

Verses 24-26: A word/here as to guidance through the providence of God. Many cling to providences, as though they were to be the guide for faith. Nothing could be more remarkable providence than that which placed Moses in the court of Pharaoh, but it was not the guide for the faith of Moses. Brought up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty in words and in deeds— there providence had placed him. If ever there was a remarkable providence, it was the case of Moses. After having been hid three months of his parents, till they could hide him no longer, he is put in an ark of bulrushes among the flags by the river's bank. Thus exposed and crying, the babe attracts the attention of Pharaoh's daughter, who with her maidens is brought down to the place just at the moment. She has compassion on him, listens to the suggestion of the young woman his sister, gives him in charge to his own mother to be nursed for her; and he becomes her son. The first thing he does, when come to years, is to give it all up. Had Moses

reasoned, his reasoning might have had great scope of argument; he might have said, God's providence has placed me here; I can use all this influence for God's people, and the like. But he never thought of such a thing. His place was with God's people. He did not act for God's people merely; he did not patronise God's people; his place was with and amongst God's people. God's providence had given him a position which he might relinquish; but it was no guide for conscience. There may be the most plausible reasoning about the thing; but when the "eye is single," the "whole body will be full of light." Moses saw in his brethren (though a feeble people) "the people of God," and he identified them as such with the glory of God. This is what faith always does. They may be in a feeble and failing position, or they may be in a blessed position; that is not the question: faith identifies the people of God with the glory of God, and acts accordingly.

The children of Israel were in a very bad condition: still they were "the people of God"; and the first thing recorded of the faith of Moses is, that he took his place amongst the afflicted people of God. If reproach was on them, it was "the reproach of Christ"; and he "esteemed it greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." He reckoned with God, and this kept his soul clear of every other influence. He looked right on: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee," etc. The hght cannot shine down along another path.

Verse 27: Faith had brought Moses into a straight line with "the recompense of the reward"; and when in that path, faith enabled him to identify himself with God, to look up to God as his power. At once came "the wrath of the king." But the same faith that saw glory for him at

the end of the path saw God for him all through the path. This is the secret of real strength. What unbelief does is to compare ourselves and our own strength with circumstances. What faith does is to compare God with circumstances. Take the case of the spies; Numbers 13, 14. They said, “all the people of the land are men of a great stature; and we saw the giants there, the sons of Anak, that come of the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.” If the Israelites compared their stature with that of the Anakims, they had no business there. What said Caleb and Joshua? They stilled the people, saying, “They are as bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.” That is, they compared these sons of Anak with God; what matter then whether they were giants or grasshoppers? They spoke the language of faith. It was no reasoning about circumstances; it was just simply saying, Greater is He that is for us than all that can be against us. God was there. That is what makes the path of faith so simple. How did David reason? He did not go and reason about the height of Goliath and about his own smallness of stature; he brought God in. There is an “uncircumcised” man, he said, defying “the armies of the living God” — right, and very good reasoning!

When the glory set before us leads in the way of the promises, and we take our place with the despised and afflicted people of God, the world will not like it, and the “wrath of the king” will be the consequence. Now this is always a thing feared and trembled before, until God becomes clearly known by the soul as a God for it. When Pharaoh pursued after the children of Israel (Ex. 14) with all his chariots and his horsemen and his army (he

had let them go from serving him, but there was no change of heart towards them), the Lord allowed the people to be shut in between the pursuit of Pharaoh (the power of evil) and the Red Sea. They were quite shut in; and then he says, “Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord,” etc.

But if God is coming to deal with sinners, He must deal with them as what He is—a holy God. Let them be Israelites or let them be Egyptians, He must deal with them as what He is. The judgment of God against sin must be met. God’s purpose was to save Israel, and in doing this He was about to judge Egypt: But then, He says, if I come to deal in judgment with the Egyptians; if I come to deliver my people; I must come such as I am; and I must therefore raise the question of sin. And it is always so. When God deals with the heart, if there is a question between it and Satan’s power (and when the soul is freshly awakened, the miserable consciousness of Satan’s power, the slavery of Satan’s service, will often have more real power in producing exercise of heart than all the fear of the consequences of sin), that is not the first question. God never begins there: He does deliver from it; but He never begins there. He begins by raising a question between Himself and the sinner.

The children of Israel had fallen into idolatry. They were worse than the Egyptians; they had the promises of God (Gen. 15), and were worshipping the idols of Egypt. But they felt not their sin against God. They groaned under their taskmasters, and sighed by reason of their bondage. Well, in all the tender commiseration of His having seen the affliction of His people and His being love, God came down and spake to Moses as to about to deliver them. But if judgment against sin was coming in,

Israel must be secured from that judgment, or it would fall on them as surely as it did on the Egyptians. The question was not whether Israel could stand in the presence of Pharaoh, but whether Israel could stand in the presence of God.

Verse 28: God told them (see Exodus 12) to take of the blood of the paschal lamb, and strike it on the two side-posts and on the door-posts of the houses wherein they dwelt. “For,” said He, “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 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.” The destroying angel passed through the land. In the darkness and dead of night he did his work. He knew no difference between the houses of the Israelites and those of the Egyptians, unless marked with the blood. Over such a house he passed; he saw the blood on the lintel and on the door-posts, he looked no further—he entered not into the house.

All God’s dealings with sinners must be upon the ground of His holy judgment of sin. But then, in the case of salvation He awakens the soul to the sense of this; He says, Judgment is coming in, and there is the consequence of it. And then He puts upon the lintel and the door-posts the blood. Before God sets us out on the journey He makes it evident that He has settled the question of sin; that the demands of His justice have been perfectly met. God will not go on with us until the question between Himself and us is settled. He may deal with us in grace, but He does not set out with us on the journey until that is done which entirely satisfies His

moral being. Before Israel began their journey God had passed through the land, and over them, in judgment. They had feasted in the happiest confidence under the protection of the blood of the lamb.

Before we commence the walk of faith, the question of God's judgment of sin must be a settled question. All that which is properly speaking Christian life, the path of experience, the life of faith, is based on God's having passed over us. He cannot pass over sin. What He does (working faith in us by His Spirit) is, He shews us the blood. Having awakened us to the consciousness of sin, before we are even beginning the journey of faith, He teaches us that He has settled the question about it once and for ever. "Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more." Then He becomes a God for us by the way. Faith sees and apprehends (not that there is no sin, no judgment, but) that by God's own work and word the question between itself and God is a settled question. Blood has been put between the soul and God—the blood of God's own Son. Never was there such a judgment of sin. I may see myself to be the vilest of sinners, but I see that which has perfectly met the demands of God's justice. "The blood shall be to you for a token," etc.

But then the soul has been accustomed to be a slave. After the children of Israel had seen the blood upon the door-posts, we find them trembling before the power of Pharaoh. They were on the road, but they were not out of Egypt. They were still in Pharaoh's territory. They had the knowledge of deliverance from the judgment of God that had fallen upon the firstborn (of the blood of the lamb as having met and sheltered them from that), yet they were still in conflict with Pharaoh. At the appointed

time they set out on their journey. Leaving the world, they forsake Egypt, the place where they had been slaves; and Pharaoh, the prince of the world, pursues after them. Then comes dread and dismay. Till we know that the death of Christ has emancipated us from the country of Satan, we never know full rest of soul. Satan can make some claim on us till we can tell him that we are dead and risen with Christ. Because they had been slaves to the power of Pharaoh, and because they dreaded Pharaoh (and there is no wonder), they had not the faith that says, “If God be for us,” etc. Pharaoh was stronger than Israel; but God was stronger than Pharaoh. When they lifted up their eyes and beheld the Egyptians marching after them, they were sore afraid. 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.” They were here in a worse condition as to their feelings than ever before. And it is so often with saints. We have need of the power of God with us and for us, and to know it too (as well as that when the judgment of God was against us the blood satisfied His judgment) in order to fulness of peace. I may have seen the virtue of Christ’s blood to screen from judgment; but it is quite a different thing to have a constant settled certainty that God is for me.

The first thing, when God has awakened the soul to a sense of sin in His sight, is the question how it may be secured against its righteous judgment. Then it sees the

blood on the doorposts, and gets peace. Therefore if I lose sight of the blood, God is still, to my soul's apprehension, a judge. Now that is not at all the proper place for a believer to be in. There is the justice of God, and "without shedding of blood, is no remission." If I can say that the blood which has been shed has satisfied that justice, I can see that God is no longer a judge—His justice has been satisfied. But if on the other hand His justice has to be satisfied, God is still a judge.

The Israelites got so terrified, distressed, and dismayed, so under the power of evil which was against them, that they got into the practical question in conflict whether God or Satan was to have them. And so constantly it is with saints. We have been such slaves to the power of Satan that we have not a consciousness of redemption to God. There was Pharaoh (Satan to us), the power of evil, pursuing them, and driving them up to this point, till death and judgment (of which the Red Sea is the symbol) stared them in the face. The question must be settled, if they could get through death and judgment. They could not get out of the difficulty by their own strength: the Red Sea was before them, and they could not get through it; Pharaoh and all his host behind them, and there was no escaping by another road. They were quite shut in, and brought to the sense that there must be a deliverer or it was all over with them. All this was exceedingly alarming in itself, but it was God's way of delivering. "And Moses said, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you to-day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever." You can neither go backward nor forward; you must just stand still and

see the salvation of the Lord. “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”

The Lord steps in, and puts Himself between Satan and His people. “The angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night.” Before He gives the comfort of deliverance, He always takes care that Satan does not touch us.

What comes to Israel then? Verse 21: The very thing that seemed to be their destruction becomes their salvation. “And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided, And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.” It was no battle for Israel against Pharaoh. “And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel: for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their

horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them: there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore."

Death is the wages of sin; there is no escape; the Red Sea must be passed. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." There is not one into whose hands this may fall, looking at it as our natural portion (I am not now speaking of Christ taking it for us, as He has for all those who believe; as it goes on to say, "So Christ was once offered," etc.), but must come there. It is the natural consequence of sin. No matter whether Egyptians or Israelites, death and judgment overtake all. The Red Sea must be passed. But if met in grace, as it was by Israel, we shall see that this very thing is our full and unmingled deliverance. There poor Israel stood and looked at the eternal overthrow of their enemies. When the Egyptians were lying dead on the sea shore, they were safe, singing the song of redemption. True, the wilderness had to be passed, Amalek to be fought with, and the like; but they were out of Egypt. They were singing the song of deliverance in simple-hearted confidence; Egypt was left, and left for

ever; the power of Pharaoh broken; not an Egyptian to be seen.

And now about the “assaying” to pass the Red Sea: it is that, alas! which many are doing at the present hour (in a better spirit indeed than these Egyptians, yet with an equally terrible result to themselves). I am not now speaking of the avowed enemies of God, though we are all by nature enemies of God; neither of those who are pursuing after the people of God; but of those who are “assaying” to pass through death and judgment in their own way. Just because they are in a Christian country and amongst Christians, they hope with the name of Christ to get to heaven in company with the people of God. But each must pass through all that is in God’s road there. If we have got up to the Red Sea, death and judgment must be passed; and where shall we be with all our Egyptian wisdom and learning, with all our chariots and horsemen, before death and judgment? Death and judgment must be passed through. If we are “assaying “to do this without God for us; if the question of death and judgment be not already and altogether settled (as it was for Israel when “by faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land “), it must be our destruction. People confess they have to die, and that after death there is a judgment, and that they must stand in that judgment; but if they are “assaying” to do this in their own strength, it must be then positive and infallible destruction.

We must all, converted or unconverted, give up the world. The veriest votary of the world must sooner or later give up its vanities and its pleasures, its hopes and its interests; he must give them up. The only difference is this, that the Christian gives them up for God; the

worldling gives them up because he cannot keep them. The king of Egypt gave up Egypt and Egypt's court, as well as Moses; but there is this difference, that the king of Egypt gave it up for judgment, Moses gave it up for Christ.

The very hopes people have will be their ruin. They see God's Israel going to Canaan, and they hope to get there too. But they are going to heaven in their own way, and they are going to heaven in their own strength. What does the Psalmist say? Give thy servant a favourable judgment? No: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant? for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." They are hoping that it will be all well with them in the judgment; they take the name of Christ upon their lips, and think to get as safely to heaven as real believers. But they must pass through that which brings out into full light, clearly and evidently, what they really are; they must pass the barrier God has set in the way; they must go through death and judgment; and there, there will "no man living be justified."

God's rod of power was stretched out when Israel was passing through, and there was no sea (except as a wall on their right hand, and on their left, shutting out Pharaoh). Where do we find the ground of the confidence of faith? It is altogether of a different sort from that of the mere professor. That sea! says the believer, I dare not go through it; I dare not put a foot in it, except at the bidding of God, and then there is no sea. Because people call themselves Christians, the mischief is that they expect to get through as well as the real people of God. Because the way has been opened to faith, so that faith can tread it, and walk through as on dry ground, they think they can go too. The path is

opened to faith, and there is not a drop of water there; death is gone, and judgment is gone—all is over: it is dry ground, and God has made it so; but it is the people of faith alone who can tread it. That which is dry ground to Israel is sea to all besides. Let the Egyptians attempt to follow, and things take their natural course: death and judgment are there, and there shall be no man living justified. The believer has no such thought as that of going to stand in the judgment. When God steps in between him and Pharaoh, what does he see? The "salvation of the Lord." The very thing he dreaded becomes his security. Christ is there in the deep. He sees the judgment of God in all its weight and in all its power borne by Christ. "Deep calleth unto deep, at the rfoise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." The waves and the billows of the Red Sea have gone over Christ. There I have seen death and judgment; I have seen the Son of God sweating great drops of blood because of my sins; I have seen the Son of God crying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" I have seen Him made sin, bearing the judgment due to sinners; yes, I have seen all the weight and terror of those waves; but they have passed over Christ. It is the thing that saves me, is death; it is the thing that saves me, is judgment. Grace has found its way into death, and it is all "dry land." God takes me there, and says, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord."

I see this great and full salvation in a risen Christ; and what I get is, that death is mine. "All things," the apostle says, "are ours"; yes, death is "ours." Satan has meddled with death and judgment, and his power in death is completely broken. Like Pharaoh, he has been overcome

in the last stronghold in which he held us captive. “Through death” Christ “has destroyed him that had the power of death,” etc. Have the waves of the Red Sea, the billows of the wrath of God, gone over Christ? He has abolished all that was against us. Satan has come and meddled, and what has he done? He has put Christ to death; but the triumph of the prince of darkness was but the display of his defeat. He has come and grappled with Christ, put forth all his strength against Him, struck Him with the whole sting and power he had in death; but Christ has risen out of it on the other side, beyond his reach; and now, morally, death has no power for the believer.

As the captain of salvation Christ had come down and put Himself in the place of those over whom Satan had the power of death by the judgment of God. If He has taken their cause in hand, He must be treated according to their circumstances. He stood there, and felt all the weight and horror of the place. Knowing the terrors of the wrath of God, the bitterness of the cup He had to drink, He prayed that if it were possible the cup might pass from Him. But love had brought Him there: “by the grace of God “He tasted death. God has settled the question. All the account against me, the ground of Satan’s accusations appealing to the righteous judgment of God, is gone. God’s wrath has all passed over. The moment we come up on the other side of the Red Sea it is all done; we have only our song to sing— “The Lord has triumphed gloriously,” etc. The Egyptians whom we have seen to-day we shall see again no more for ever.

Israel could sing this song before they took one step in the wilderness; they could say, “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 thy arm shall they be as 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."

There was all possible difference marked now between poor Israel who had God for them, and the Egyptians who (with a great deal more human possibility of getting through) were driving on in the carelessness and folly of their own power, to be met and brought to a stand-still by the power of death and judgment; just like poor unconverted people, who, because they see Christians going to heaven, are "assaying" to go also; but without the knowledge of the blood (that which can alone settle the question of death and judgment, so that they should have God for them to step in between themselves and Pharaoh), as having been sprinkled on the houses in Egypt. To all such the very place of salvation will be the place of ruin.

Israel never sang this song when it was merely a question of blood on the door-posts. They did not sing it till they had taken four of five days' journey from the place of their bondage, and had been shut up between the Red Sea and Pharaoh. They were on the road, they

had journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, and from Succoth to Etham, and they were encamped before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They had left Egypt, and had brought over all the malice of Satan against them. But the power of God was with them and for them, and it was simply, “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” The controversy was between God and Pharaoh (not between Israel and Pharaoh); and it was soon settled. God would have us broken down to this. They had seen the blood upon the door-posts (there was not any question of sin between themselves and God; weak, feeble, and failing, they might be, but their sins were blotted out); they had set out in good earnest from Egypt, with their kneading-troughs bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. Now they sing of accomplished redemption. They had the desert to tread, where there was no way, nor food, nor water; the manna had to be gathered day by day, and if the sun was up it was all gone. Spiritual diligence is needed: “The diligent soul shall be made fat.” But they were redeemed, and they had God with them, and God for them, to lead and to guide them in the way. Well, beloved, have our souls seen this redemption? Have we been brought yet to the Red Sea, and to feel that we could not tread the path opened to faith in our own strength; that if we attempted to do it we should be drowned? And have we found that it is no sea, but dry ground, that there is not a drop of water left there? If we have known the blood of Christ as our only hope before God, looking at Him as a judge; if we have known that we must leave Egypt and tread the wilderness on our way to the promised rest, we may still be in measure unable to say, “Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed,” etc. That does not mean that we are not on

the road, but that we do not know, properly speaking, God to be for us. We may as sinners have looked simply to the blood; but if we have not fully understood the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as emancipating us from the country and power of Satan, we have not stood still to see the salvation of the Lord. The waves and the billows of God’s wrath have gone over the head of Christ; and He has made it to be no sea. He has come down into the very place of wrath on account of sin; and He has risen out of it, and all is over. The thunderbolt has come on the head of Christ, and the storm is over for faith. Nothing gives such a sense of the horribleness of sin, nothing is such a testimony to the judgment of God against sin, as seeing Christ under it; and yet nothing is such a testimony to the love of God towards the poor sinner.

Balaam, Hired Of Balak, And Used Of God

Numbers 22-24

It is a wonderful thing to see the way in which, through the overruling power of God, the efforts of Satan against the people of God only bring them out the more distinctly in their own place of blessing.

We find in these chapters the connection of the name of God with the power of Satan. Some of the instruments which he uses may be, and some of them may not be, conscious that it is Satan's power which actuates them. Nothing could be greater confusion than that which here passes between Balaam and Balak.

Balaam, we know, was a thoroughly wicked man. (See Rev. 2:14; 2 Peter 2:15, 16; Jude 11.) Nothing could exceed the wickedness and perverseness of his ways. And yet he is called a prophet; as it is said, "Who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet." We know that he was acquainted with and used enchantments (chap. 24:1); and yet, when he comes to Balak, he says, "Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak," chap. 22:38. Balak was looking for the power of evil against the children of Israel, God's people; and yet looking for it from God; chap. 23:27. There was a sort of looking to the power and intervention of God, although God was not known; and thus all was confusion.

And so in the world; even where Satan is working, and where in those who are intelligent in evil he is looked to as working, there is often a certain vague looking to God. Thus there is complete confusion—man's will being Satan's will, and yet with a certain owning of God.

Chapter 22:1-6. We see the enmity of the world against the people of God brought out, and especially against the power of the people of God. God's power was with His people, and this drew out the enmity of Satan. When the Son of God came into the world, the whole energy of Satan's power and enmity was directed against Him; so afterwards against the apostles, those who had "turned the world upside down," Acts 17:6. But God's power was with and for His people. See the song of Moses; Ex. 15:14-16. God had redeemed His people with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm from the power and bondage of Satan, and had brought them to Himself; Ex. 19:4. When this is the case, Satan seeks to force others into an open opposition to the people of God. Their presence becomes intolerable to their enemies. But the effect of it all is, to bring out God's people as being under His eye and care. The very wish that God should curse Israel only brought out the more His distinct blessing upon them. "And he [Balaam] took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom Jehovah hath not defied? For from the tops of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations," chap. 23:7-9. Here we find the

effect of Satan's opposition was to bring out into the clearest manifestation that they were not of the world.

So long as Israel were living in Egypt, there was nothing at all that drew out the thoughts and feelings of Balak and Balaam against them, or that made them intolerable to the world; but the chief point of the testimony to their blessing is that they were a peculiar people, separated from all other people unto God, according to that word, "Jehovah hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people," Deut. 26:18.

Verse 11 and onward: Balaam, at the suggestion of Balak, seeks to curse Israel from "another place." He tells Balak, "Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I go and meet—— yonder." He does not seem to know whom he was going to meet. It is all the most thorough and perfect confusion. He says, "While I go and meet—— yonder." But there Jehovah meets him, and puts a word in his mouth proving the firmness of God's purpose concerning His people. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless." Balaam would gladly have altered this testimony of God; but he says, "He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it."

Then comes the testimony to the completeness of God's justification of His people: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." This is not a mere abstract statement of truth. Israel had acted so failingly and unbelievingly during their wilderness journey, as to bring out from Moses, the meekest man upon the face of the earth, the expression,

“Ye have been rebellious against Jehovah from the day that I knew you,” Deut. 9:24. The result of the judgment of the man of God about them after forty years’ experience was, that they were a stiff-necked and rebellious people; but the judgment of God in reference to their justification was altogether opposite to his judgment of the moral condition of the people.

It is most important in applying this to ourselves to draw the distinction clearly between these two things; the judgment of the Spirit of God within me as to what we are practically, as to the evil of the flesh, etc., and the testimony of the Spirit as to what God’s judgment is in reference to us in Christ. We often find the soul forming through the Spirit of God a righteous judgment about itself, and forgetting that the ground on which it stands before God, the resting-place of faith, is what He has wrought for us in the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of God judges sin in me by virtue of its character as seen in the light of the holiness of God, but it makes me know that I am not judged for it, because Christ has borne the judgment for me. It is no question of examining the details of either good or evil that we find in ourselves; it is altogether a question of the efficacy and value of Christ’s work, and of His acceptance. We either stand under the broad condemnation of God, sinners dead in trespasses and sins, or are “accepted in the beloved.” Although it is most important that we should judge ourselves, as it is said, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged,” etc. (1 Cor. 11:31, 32); yet this is quite a distinct thing from the judgment which God forms about us through the work of Christ. At the end of a long course of failure in the children of Israel, after their perverseness has been fully proved, God “hath not

beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." Where the soul of a believer confounds the judgment of the Spirit within and about himself with the judgment of God through the work of Christ for him, there can be no peace.

"Jehovah his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." The distinguishing mark of the people of God is, that He is in them and among them. (See I Cor. 14:25.) The utter feebleness of the saints is shewn wherever this is not the case. It is a blessed truth, that God has for ever saved and justified His children; but this is in order that He may "dwell among them," Ex. 29:45, 46.

"God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn." I dare not meddle with them, Balaam says; I have too much understanding of what they are, to do so; they are connected with God, with His strength and power. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! "According to what time? The time when Israel was faint and weak, discouraged by reason of the length of the way, and none of their enemies on the other side of Jordan conquered. Their enemies were much mightier than they (Deut. 7:1, etc.), and yet he says, "What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey and drink the blood of the slain." The moment he sees them under the eye of God he says that.

“And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that Jehovah speaketh, that I must do? And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon,” etc.

“And when Balaam saw that it pleased Jehovah to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face towards the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said,” etc. (chap. 24:1-9). He now begins to look at the people of God themselves, and sees Israel abiding in their tents in their own proper loveliness. The sight of the fairness of God’s people thus is the occasion of the Spirit of God speaking as He does (v. 5 and onwards), “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth,” etc. He looks at the people of God themselves, and sees their beauty in the vision of the Almighty. There were Israel occupied with their own foolish thoughts below; and this scene was going on above.

So it is with us, beloved friends: we are occupied with our own (ofttimes) foolish thoughts; the accuser is speaking against us; and yet nothing can prevail, because God works for us. I am not now speaking of God justifying us, but of much more; and that is, the beauty of the order, and the never-failing source of refreshment of God’s people— “all my springs are in thee.” God

brings this out most fully through the evil desire of Balak and Balaam.

We see in these chapters, man working according to Satan’s will, and yet looking to the power and the intervention of God. Hence all is confusion: and it will ever be so. But the moment the children of God get into their right place before God, there is no confusion, no perplexity: the path is as simple as possible.

May the Holy Spirit enable us to realise as our own that peculiar feature of the church of God, and that which is the power of their holiness, and of their comfort too: “The Lord their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them.”

The Rejected Man

Genesis 3

It is a good thing, seeing the great levity of our hearts, that we should all of us sometimes look at our origin, at what we were, and at the actual corruption of the stock whence we are derived. Thus shall we see what God has done, and the revelation He has made of Himself in what we are.

The Israelite was instructed to remember the day that he came out of Egypt all the days of his life (Deut. 16:2); and the confession made by him when presenting his basket of the firstfruits of the land was this: “a Syrian ready to perish was [not I, but] my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous; and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and when we cried unto Jehovah the God of our fathers, Jehovah heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression; and Jehovah brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: and he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey,” Deut. 26:5-10.

Our first father hath sinned. Thus the fountain was defiled. Evil has abounded, and sin has taken its free, full course. We learn in all this scene in the garden what has distorted the natural conscience, in circumstances so plain that we can say what they are. Now it is hard to learn what we are, because that which has made us

sinners in heart has made us sinners in understanding also. As the conscience is affected and.renewed by the Holy Spirit, so is it perverted by sin. There may be a false standard of good and evil, and thus blindness through that (as a law of darkness), as well as corruption of heart. Paul says, “I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which thing I also did,” etc. (Acts 26:9-11). And the time was come, the Lord forewarns, when those that killed the disciples would “think they did God service,” John 16:2.

The book of Genesis gives us, in the first dealings of God with man, the first grand elements of truth with exceeding freshness and energy. All that was said by Satan to Eve (except “Ye shall not surely die,” v. 4), was in a certain sense true. That was not true. And this is the way he deceives. He does not present evil in its own hideous garb, but in a plausible, insinuating manner. He can tell truth if it subserve sin—much attractive truth, so that he win attention by it; but he never uses it to lead to obedience. Both that which was spoken by Adam and Eve, and that which was spoken by Satan, shews the exceeding deceitfulness of sin. Where God has not His place in the soul, in the assertion of our independence, our weakness and inconsistency open the way to the guile of the enemy, and the mind does not see its departure from truth. “I said in my haste, All men are liars,” Psa. 116:11. So again, Micah 7 (where there is every kind of corruption), “The best of them is as a briar: the most upright is as a thorn hedge… Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom,” etc. They had departed from God. To learn what sin is to

any purpose is to learn the source from which we have departed. We have departed from God.

Notice, the first thing introduced here is the subtility of Satan. It was not flagrant open sin and wickedness when Eve replied to it; it is not, I am the devil come to deceive you. He puts the present pleasantness of the thing, and with subtility inquires, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? “The Holy Ghost doe?: not say the devil was wicked, but He says, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

The woman entered into conversation with him, and she was clean gone. This questioning what God had done was a calling in question of His goodness and love; just the temptation to mistrust God. ‘Hath God said so and so?’ is in effect, ‘Well, do not believe Him, He has kept back something worth the having.’ The moment Eve entered into the discussion, and parleyed with the serpent, God was altogether gone from her; and all was gone.

She ought to have said, Why ask me? Surely He hath done whatsoever it hath pleased Him to do. A right mind would have rejected the temptation at once; a true heart would have fallen back upon God. “He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not,” 1 John 5:18. Satan “touched” Eve. He had got his question into her mind, and she had departed from her strength; for God had lost His place in her soul. When Eve began questioning God’s goodness and answering Satan’s question, she was putting herself

above God, and judging God, and thus putting herself into the hands of Satan. Had Eve been worshipping God, Satan could not have “touched” her; but, judging God, she took the place of independence, and thus Satan had power over her, and, being wiser than she, he deceived her.

We cannot judge God’s ways without judging God: we may adore Him in His ways, but the moment we judge or question that which He has revealed, we get above God, we make ourselves gods, and put God in the place of the creature as subject to us. This brings our souls under the power of every one that is more clever than ourselves; we are in their hands, and they can do what they please with us. Now the devil is more clever than we are (the woman was no match for him). Therefore we ought to keep God ever in His place of God in our souls, lest Satan should make gods of us, and set us judging God Himself. If God be displaced, we get into the place of those who are irresponsible, and as creatures become the prey of any more cunning than ourselves.

The soul, when first awakened, finds its place before God. It may not all at once have peace and joy, but this at any rate it learns—to submit to God, and to be willing to be taken up anyhow, so that God will but have it at all. How does God keep this His place in our souls? Because it is the constant aim of Satan to slip in between God and our souls. In order to meet Satan, we must get into the place of entire responsibility to God. God did not hold His place in Eve’s mind, or she would not have been questioning His love, and judging Him: there was the want of submission. And may it not be that there is the want of submission in us, that our minds are

questioning and judging, and not submitting to God's righteousness?

Notice also that Eve was in full recognition of God's command. "And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die," v. 2, 3. There was the clear and definite knowledge of what God had said to her. So with ourselves. We have all heard about God, and about His way of salvation; yes, many of us have before our minds much of scriptural knowledge. But this did not put Eve beyond the power of Satan. Neither will it us—it may only the more immediately put us into the hands of Satan. We all know what God has said about our sins (we may not believe it perhaps: that is another thing), that "there is none righteous, no, not one." We all know that Christ came to save the lost; but then, if we do not know that we are lost, this knowledge, remaining without faith, does not take us out of the hands of Satan, but really gives Satan power over us. We must have delivering power from God before we can be out of Satan's power. We must have conviction of sin before we are off the ground of sin.

The very moment that Satan got Eve to listen to one breath of his suggestions, that moment he took God's place in her soul. You cannot suppose she would have parleyed with the devil, and have listened to him as to somebody speaking to her as her friend, if she had not had confidence in him. So that she did trust in Satan. The truth is, she held not with God, but with Satan. She looked upon Satan as a better friend than God. Eve was not content. Now the enemy of our souls may not be met

by the simplicity of truth, because of the want of simplicity of our minds.5 Her reply was truth, but it was truth not held in communion with God. She thought God had kept back something that was competent to make her happy. It was not a settled thing with her, that God knew and had provided all that was needed for her happiness. And have we no desires for anything not actually given to us? There was distrust that God had power in Himself to make her happy, and therefore she was desiring and seeking it somewhere else. This was the beginning of it all. This led to man's willingly subjecting himself to the dominion of Satan. And now we see the world bent on providing itself with pleasures apart from God.

And how is it with you, dear friends? Let me ask, Is this your case? Are you wanting something that God will not allow you to have? Man naturally does not believe that God is competent to make him happy, and therefore he desires the things of the world, supposing that they can make him happy. This to the end is the subtle state of the flesh, even in God's children; not trusting God to make one happy. It is a mercy, in a certain sense, that man must earn his bread with the sweat of his brow (for God is not mocked; and when He said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground," etc., what a store of accompanying sorrow and toil came in as the result of man's disobedience!), since that prevents the giving up of our poor race to the unbounded gratification of their desires away from God.

When the soul is distressed or cast down, that is not in itself sin. But sin comes in when there is distrust of God. Satan gets entrance for his full power in the soul the moment there is a shade of distrust of God. God will be

trusted in the confidence of His love. Eve had the highest place in the world; she was surrounded by blessing, and possessed of actual happiness (man's state in Eden was one of actual happiness, though not of spiritual power such as the saints now have); but the very moment she felt distrust in God's competency to make her happy, it was all gone. Distrust in God is the positive condition of every natural man: all are seeking their happiness in something or other, if they are not trusting in God to make them happy. It is a solemn thought that one-half of the world is employed in providing the means of pleasure for the other half.

Satan was trusted by Eve. If God is not trusted, Satan most certainly will be. Man, standing alone in his independence, is not independent, but the slave of every man,6 the slave of sin and Satan. Like Eve he trusts Satan rather than God. She hoped on his authority that there was a doubt about the fulfilment of God's threatenings. God had said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," chap. 2:17. He said, "Ye shall not surely die," impugning the truth of God's word. And so he says now. Men say in their hearts that sin will not bear the consequences God has said it will— "The wages of sin is death," Rom. 6:23. No man could go on if he believed what God said, instead of believing Satan. The happiness of man is faith in Satan's lie in this respect. They are proceeding in the same course, listening to that old detected lie of Satan. But God has said, "Ye shall surely die," and there is an end of all pleasures. So that all the devil can do is to hide the consequences of sin. He could not keep men going on if he did not keep out of their sight that truth, "Ye shall surely die." It is not that terror of it would change their

hearts; but if they did really believe it they would not have one happy day here. Where is the earthly happiness these words will not blast— “Ye shall surely die”? But men believe what Satan says, and disbelieve what God says. “The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life,” have present enjoyment connected with them—man rushes to take the bait, willingly selling himself to Satan, though in so doing he is morally conscious that he is not acting according to the commandments of God. Observe, I am not here speaking of gross sin, but of disbelief in God Himself.

Let us see the next step. God has lost His character in the heart of man; all man’s confidence in God is gone: and Satan the liar and arch-deceiver is believed. Now the devil can say whatever he likes, he having the confidence of the heart instead of God. “God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, they your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil,” v. 5. He began by insinuating that God knew the fruit would make her happy, but grudged to give it; then he questioned the truthfulness of God; now he adds, “ye shall be as gods,” tempting man to assume the privileges of God Himself.7 How entirely had Eve forgotten every thought of God? Her soul should have recoiled with horror from the proposition. “What, I account myself as God! I take this glory to myself, and cast off God! Am I to set about being a thief—to take from God His glory, and become like Him— I, creature, and indebted to Him for everything?” How different the way of Him who, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant”! etc. (Phil. 2:6). But when we are once away from God, we have no spiritual

sense of sin at all. Eve had no sense of the sin of leaving God out, and making herself the centre. And this is ever the result of exalting man, of looking at God's ways through man's telescope. Dependence is true exaltation in a creature, when the object of it is right. It looks up, and is exalted above itself. See David (Psalm 8) the greatest philosopher. But Eve was so willing to get rid of God that she sought by robbery to make herself equal with God. She may not have known the extent of the presumption of her confidence in Satan's he: but the secret of it all was this, that she had forgotten God, and thought only of herself—she had got self as a centre, and God was not in all her thoughts. When God is not our centre, all that by which we can exalt ourselves becomes the motive and principle of our hearts.

"The man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." This is God's account of fallen man: Satan never deceives by a mere abstract lie. But supposing Eve could have known that it was the truth, it would have been only an added deception, because it would not have been the truth in power in the conscience. Her heart having departed from God, her then seeing it to be truth would only have added to her darkness. I am doubly blind if the truth does not lead my heart towards God and put me under God.

Eve goes on in the way of sin. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat," in positive and known disobedience to God's command, acting on the present enjoyment without any regard to consequences. And now she becomes the active instrument of sin, "and gave also unto her husband with

her; and he did eat," v. 6. The man was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14); but more shame to him in following the woman (who was deceived), contrary to the truth of God. Natural affection often becomes the means of drawing the heart away from God.

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked: and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons," v. 7. Here we find conscience at work, not conscience towards God, but that of shame, the conscience that drove out the accusers of the adulterous woman; John 8. The guilty pair have the sense of the shame of their nakedness, and they seek to hide it the one from the other. The divine work in enlightening the conscience gives a man to see the guilt of sin, the exceeding sinfulness of sin; but sin has its shame as well as its guilt, and the natural conscience always seek to hide the shame of its sin with some fig-leaf covering.

This is no proof of conversion; it is only the main proof that man has got into a bad conscience, and cannot get out of it. Adam and Eve dare not look at each other, nor yet to God. They cannot bear the condition they have got into, and they cannot change it, therefore they hide it. But do not mistake this for repentance. Shame merely drives them to hide from, and excuse themselves to, God. And so with ourselves: as long as the shame of sin continues, we try to hide it, to get away from it; but it only drives us farther and farther from God. It is not a divinely-taught conscience, because we are more concerned about the shame before men than the sinfulness before God. Until God has the place which man now occupies in our hearts, there is no conversion: the soul is not looking to God. We may be able to reason

about the tender love and grace of God, but our sense of the guilt of sin should ever be deeper than that of its shame. When the conscience is before God, guilt brings sorrow; and yet we can as sinners reckon upon the love and the kindness of God.

And now the dreadful moment arrives when they hear the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. “And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden,” v. 8. The Lord comes not with a fiery sword in judgment as yet;8 but still He comes as an “adversary “in some wise.

Thus Jesus came, seeking an account of the fruit produced. “Agree with thine adversary, quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him.” Christ was saying, I am yet in the way with you. “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” The axe was laid to the root of the tree; Luke 3:9. Therefore the only thing to be done was to agree with Him who had the right against them, “lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge dehver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”

“And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” (v. 9). How came you not to be with me! “Enoch walked with God,” Gen. 5:22. God had no occasion to say to him, “Where art thou?” “And he [Adam] said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself,” v. 10. If the Lord were here, those who are ignorant of His grace would go out one by one, like the accusers of the poor

adulterous woman. When Christ spoke to their conscience in those words, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,” they walked out from His presence one by one (not all together, lest it should be noticed that they were sinners). They were careful of their character before men, but not before God. Had they been willing to confess their sin and to submit themselves to God’s righteousness, they would have stayed. It was not that the Lord used any reproach to those Pharisees, but He fixed the sin on their consciences. So God merely says here to Adam, How comes it that you are not with me?

And how comes it, dear friends, that you have found bitterness and sorrow in the world? You will say, perhaps, it is because sin is in the world; but it is sin you have got into. You talk of a good conscience: the best conscience of a sinner only leads him to get as far away as he can from the presence of God. Do you call it a good conscience here in Adam, getting away from God and then judging for himself about his state? “I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And it is thus even with the saint if he gets into sin; there is darkness in the sin, and fear in the conscience after the sin. And when he is convinced he must get get back again into the presence of God: and there is not unreserved confession, he seeks to excuse himself. You will always find conscience, where the heart is wrong, tends to the invention of deceit. What did Adam say? I am guilty; pardon me, O Lord? No, he practises deceit.

“And he [the Lord] said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with

me" [not "my wife": in seeking to excuse himself, he casts the blame in reality upon God. It was Thou who gavest me this woman, and] "she gave me of the tree, and I did eat," v. 11, 12.

God takes no notice of this. He turns to the woman. "And the Lord God said, What is this that thou hast done?" Eve now learns her lesson from Adam, as Adam had learned his of her before: "And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat," v. 13. All this is the truth; but conscience is not before God.

God, when He comes to deal with them about their sin, at once takes them up on the ground of their own excuses. "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee," etc. (v. 17-19). The very excuse he gave was just the height of his sin, and the very thing by which God condemned him. So also with the woman. Out of their own mouths were they judged. The plea of temptation was only in fact saying that they preferred their own lusts to God; that they listened to the devil's word more than to God's commandment.9 Still God says nothing about this at first. But what does He? He brings in grace. When He does take up the question, the man had already departed from Him—as a sinner he had departed from Him, before God came to judge him for the sin—and the effect of conscience is to drive away from God. Why does the infidel delight in infidelity? Because he dislikes God. God therefore takes up man in grace, and brings in promise. But He pronounces judgment upon what they

have done. He does not take up grace and pass lightly over sin. Man always begins with what he will do, but God begins with what He has done. The truth always looks at what I am in the sight of God.

Having traced up the evil to its source, God goes at once to the serpent as the author of it; but in pronouncing sentence He deals with Adam as lost (already the condition of man was that he was lost: God comes to no question about goodness; and there is no promise made to Adam as in the flesh), and sets up the Second Adam. "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel," v. 14, 15.

There is where grace comes in. There is the root of the evil, and there is the sole remedy to set aside what man and the devil had done. He sets up the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, "the seed of the woman," as the bruiser of the serpent's head. What is the meaning of the term probation, as applied to our present state? "To save the lost" settles that. Grace brings out man's misery and sin in the presence of God, and brings Christ in. Man is under the power of Satan, decent or indecent. The decent, moral, unconverted man is only the more deceived, but the decent slave of Satan. God takes up the full power of the evil, and sets up His power for remedy in the Lord Jesus Christ. Man is not mended in his condition. God deals with Him as already set aside and lost, and, without any proposition of mending the evil, brings in and sets up the Lord Jesus Christ, the

Second Adam, as the destroyer of the works of the devil; 1 John 3:8.

And where was He to be found? Where does God bring in His glory? The grand fact is that it is “the seed of the woman.” The spring of the evil was in the woman, and out of her was to come the deliverer. There is the glory of divine grace. Out of the eater cometh forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness; Judges 14:14. The poor wretched woman was to give birth to the Saviour of the world. God does not slur over sin, but brings out all its vileness, and sets up Christ as the Second Adam in the very place of sin—His birth-place was in the death that sin had brought into the world. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord,” Rom. 5:20, 21.

And mark the perfect contrast of the obedience of Christ! Not as the first Adam (from the place of the creature exalting himself to be as God), He from a high place takes a low. “Being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” Phil. 2:6-8. He lays not the burden on the weak one, but bears her sin. Instead of saying, “The woman that thou gavest me,” etc. (v. 12), He loved the church, and gave Himself for it; took her sins upon Himself, and came into the depth of her sins. “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all things,” etc. (Eph. 4:10), that in His blessed grace the greatest, the chief of

sinners, might be able to find a resting-place, not in their own wretched excuses, but in His divine love.

5 According as our minds are not spiritual, and in any sort affect anything not the object of the Spirit, to which they are not led by Him, therein the simplicity of truth fails to keep them, and the power of the enemy can avail itself of its subtility against them. If there were any measure of positive though mixed spirituality, apparent rejection of the word would not be possible. But Satan does not so proceed: he does not therefore propose disobedience, but modifies obedience, proposes preliminaries to it, or substitutes something instead.

6 Look at the state man is really in, as regards the trust he puts in man rather than God. If his neighbour should ask him to do anything, though his conscience may tell him God hates what his neighbour wants him to do, still, rather than disoblige his neighbour, he will sin against God. He finds it harder to refuse his neighbour than not to walk with God; it would distress him more to refuse him either in going to ungodly places of amusement or gratification, or indulging in known sin. I say it would distress him more to refuse his neighbour to join in such scenes and diversions than to break the holy commandments of God, and to despise the sacrifice of God’s Son.

7 Thus there were three things in which the devil desired that man should dishonour God; first, as to His grace; secondly, His truth; thirdly, the majesty of His Godhead.

8 Man is the only intelligent being who is still alive in successful apostasy. What do we find in the case of the fallen angels? Their sin brought its immediate and

irremediable punishment. Man, man alone, is abiding in unbelief; condemned indeed, but still the execution of the sentence is suspended.

9 In this the world most accurately follows the example of our first parents. They sin, and then plead, as an excuse or extenuation of their guilt, temptation, natural desire, expediency, etc. But we rest on God’s truth when we declare that there is no excuse that man makes, which is not in fact the ground of his condemnation, yea, the very reason of it. See in the parable of the marriage supper, for instance, the excuse those who were invited gave for not attending: “I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it, I pray thee have me excused.” Where was the “needs be”? Only just this—they preferred their own gratification to the reception of the Lord’s invitation.

Cain, His World, And His Worship

Genesis 4

It is a terrible history of man's hopelessness, the history God has given us in His word (I say history, because we have a setting forth of his sins and failures from the beginning); but then the blessed grace of God is shewn forth in it, because it tells of Christ.

It is not simply that man's heart is evil—that is true; but it has been proved evil in the presence of everything that ought to have restrained its evil. God has given us the history of man's ways, and of His dealings with man (not merely stated certain dogmas); and in whatever way He has dealt with man, we find the evil of man's heart breaking out, and following its course, spite of all.

Man, having sinned against God, is turned out of paradise; Gen. 3. The next thing we read of is the outrageous wickedness of man against his brother—Cain, Adam's first-born, slaying Abel; Gen. 4. Then comes the flood sweeping away a whole generation of evil-doers; Gen. 7. Mercy shewn to Noah (he and his house saved through the judgment), immediately afterwards we find him drunk in his tent, and Ham, his son, mocking and dishonouring him; Gen. 9.

God speaks to Israel at Sinai, thundering with His voice His righteous demands on man; yet, awful as the presence of God is (and even "Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake"), before Moses comes down from the mount, the people have made the golden calf, and broken the first link that binds them to the service of Jehovah; Ex. 32. In the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ

we see God visiting the Jew, and dealing with sinners in grace in the Person of His Son— Him they slay and hang on a tree; Acts 5:30. Israel's history (man's under the most favourable circumstances) is one scene of violence and evil all the way through; so that Stephen (in testifying to them after their rejection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Ghost in witness of Christ's glory) says they were but doing as their fathers had ever done. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye," Acts 7:51.

Notwithstanding all the dealings of God with man—the voice of God and the judgments of God—man is so hopelessly bad, that the nearer he is brought to God—the more culture there is bestowed upon him by God—only the more is manifested, and that in darker characters, the sin and desperate wickedness of his heart, working spite of all in sight even of God's judgments.

In the sin in the garden we get the character of man's evil as against God; Cain's sin is sin against a neighbour. 10 Of course both are sins against God (all sin is against God); but whilst in the sin of Adam and Eve we see lust and disobedience, in Cain's there is something more—it is sin as exhibited against a neighbour.

Man (as to his actual condition) is a sinner cast out of paradise, already out of the presence of God; and he ought to have the consciousness of being out, and that the only way of getting back to God is through His Son. We are not in paradise. We have got out of it some way or other; and we are in a world which is under judgment, and where death is staring us in the face.

Adam had just been driven out of paradise, and Cain must have had (through Adam) the remembrance that there was a time when man was not out of paradise, when he heard God's voice in the garden without fear, when he had not a bad conscience, and when he was without toil. Saints or sinners (in our own eyes), we have been driven out of Eden, and we are in the wilderness utterly excluded from God's presence. We ought to have the consciousness of being out, and of the misery of our condition; but alas! we have lost all remembrance of the place in which we once were, and have become familiarised to the ruin and desolation consequent upon sin. Still it is true, and we cannot deny it, that we have got out of paradise, and are in a world constantly under judgment. We may try to make the best of the world; but we must all feel that something has come in, something that has brought in death and judgment. Happiness cannot be associated with sin, any more than sin can be associated with God. As for man, though he seeks to buoy himself up with his sins, and to delude himself with the lie of Satan, sink he must, sooner or later, under the power of the sin and death that has come in. He is just spending his energies to make the world pleasant without God, and himself comfortable and rich in it, to die out of it.

The world he cannot keep. He may build a city for himself, as Cain did (v. 17), and call it after his own name (Cain called his city after the name of his son); but it will be with him as David speaks, "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish.

This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their saying. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them," Psa. 49.

Cain did not like the sense of the wrath of God lying upon him.11 Gone out from the presence of Jehovah (v. 16), he had become so great in the earth that he could build a city. Man never likes to be in the truth of his condition. Cain likes not to be "a fugitive and a vagabond," and he tries to build a city, and he does build a city, in the endeavour to make the world as pleasant as he can without God It might be said, What harm was there in building a city? In the first place there would never have been the necessity for this in paradise. Moreover it was a proof of insensibility as to this sin against God; it shewed quiet contentment under the effect of that punishment which at first he had felt was greater than he could bear; it was the last expression of total alienation of heart and affection from God. Driven out from the presence of God, he sets about to establish himself. He seeks for himself a home, not with God in heaven, but on the earth, from which God had pronounced him "cursed." He makes himself master of a city, where God had made him "a vagabond."

And mark further the faculty man has of making himself happy in his estrangement from God. We find amongst the family of Cain not only "the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle" (v. 20), but "the father of such as handle the harp and the organ" (v. 21), and "the instnicter of ever artificer in brass and iron" (v. 22). Now there is nothing wrong in working brass and iron; neither is there any harm in sweet sounds (we read in the book of Revelation of harpers in heaven); but what

Cain was doing was this—he was making the world pleasant without God.

These are the efforts of man, who has settled himself down in a world where judgment has placed him, and who is trying to make himself as happy and the world as pleasant as he can without God, till death and judgment overtake him. If I saw a man who had committed some wicked crime against his father, the next day playing on musical instruments, should I say there was no harm in that? Such was Cain's world. And is it not like your12 world? Is there any difference between your soul and Cain's world? Is it a better world because God's Son has been crucified in it? Has that act on the part of man made it more acceptable to God? (because that has happened since the days of Cain). Where is the difference? They had their "harps and organs"; and so have you. They had their "artificers in brass and iron"; and so have you. It was Cain's world then away from God? and it is Cain's world still. The like tree produces like fruit. Man is carrying on the world by himself, and for himself, endeavouring to keep God out of sight, as much as possible to do without Him, lest He should get at his conscience and make him miserable.

Can you find any difference between Cain's world without God and your world without God? You may object that you are not without God, that you are called by the name of Christ —are Christians, and have a religion also. Cain had a religion. He was a religious man, as religious as Abel. But he had no love to God; he had no faith. He was a religious man, but not a godly man.

It is a strange introduction to this picture, the setting forth of Cain as a worshipper, and a worshipper moreover of the true God. We read, “And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Jehovah,” v. 2, 3.

There is no mention made of false gods before the flood. Cain was a worshipper of the one living and true God. Soon after the flood there were idolaters; and then God called out a separate people as witnesses of His character to make good His name and grace. But there is not any mention made of false gods before Joshua 24:6-8, “Your fathers worshipped other gods”: a fresh crime, a fresh snare of the enemy, which called for new measures on the part of God. Satan had come and slipped himself in between man and God, and was the one that was really worshipped, though under the name of gods; and the call of Abram was the call and witness of “the most high God.”

Your “artificers in brass and iron” are worshippers of the true God. So was Cain. And he took some pains too. He offered that which he had been toiling for in “the sweat of his brow.” He was a “tiller of the ground,” and he “brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Jehovah.” He did not bring that which cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24); nay, his worship cost more of toil than that of Abel. He came in the way of nature, offering the fruit of his toil and labour; and you have done the same. This is ever the character of false worship. Religiousness does not take a man out of the character of Cain; it the rather brings him into it. So that you have not got one step in that way out of the character God has marked as that of Cain.

Observe, I do not charge you with being hypocrites, for I do not say that Cain was not sincere. There is no doubt indeed of his sincerity; but then his sincerity only evidenced the blind hardness of his heart. Human sincerity means nothing; it is often but the greatest proof of the desperate darkness in which a man is. Those were sincere of whom Christ said, “He that killeth you will think he doeth God service.” Saul of Tarsus was thoroughly sincere when he thought he “ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” He consulted moreover the chief priests and elders, the religious authorities of the day. He was zealous for his religion, and thoroughly sincere as a man, but totally blind as to God and the things of Christ, thinking to do God service by fighting against and slaying His saints. Cain in his sincerity brought to the Lord that which cost him something, that which was the fruit of his toil. He came to God as a worshipper, and in so doing offered to God that which he had brought honestly as a man, but which proved him to be ignorant of his state as a sinner.

What then is man to hope for? you will say. He is to hope for nothing. Did he not get out of paradise because of sin? what possible ground can he have as a sinner for hoping to get into heaven?

What ground had Cain for hoping that God would accept either himself or his offering? God had driven man out of paradise because of sin: what ground had he to expect by the works of his hands to get back into the presence of God? You may say, It was not the works of his hands, but the fruits of God’s creation. But what would you think of the man who was hoping to get into heaven by offering his corn and his wine to God, supposing, like Simon Magus (Acts 8), that the gift of God may be

bought? Why, it would shew that his conscience was as hard as the nether millstone, utterly insensible to the condition he was in, as well as to the character of God. The very worship of Cain proved the desperate utter insensibility of his heart to the judgment of God against sin, and to those mighty things which had just happened, the effects and consequences of which he was now experiencing.

How came man to be toiling there in the sweat of his brow? Their very toil told the tale of the curse. They had been driven out of Eden for sin. But in Cain we see utter recklessness to the judgment of God. He had forgotten the very nature and being of that God who had set man perfectly happy in the garden at the first, to keep it and to enjoy its fruits (fruits yielded to his hand without toil or labour); and supposed that by toil and labour (the judicial consequences of sin) he could produce something that God would accept. There was utter desperate recklessness to the judgment of God.

Cain's worship was the worst thing he did. It was in fact the denying that he had sinned; such blindness to what he had been, such hardness of conscience in supposing that he could get into the presence of God in his sins as if nothing at all had happened! such wretched assumption that because he was a "tiller of the ground," tilling of the ground was all right! But how came it to be all right? Because God had cursed the ground. He, a defiled sinner driven out of paradise, brings "of the fruit of the ground" which the Lord had cursed, "an offering unto Jehovah"; that is, he brings into the presence of God the sign and seal of the sin that had driven him out from God!

And how comes a man to be going Sunday after Sunday, as he says, to ‘worship God’? What is all this toil? To ‘make peace with God?’ God is “the God of peace”; He “preaches peace” —a made peace through “the blood of the cross”; yet man goes on seeking to carry something into God’s presence as ‘a duty,’ ‘to make peace’ without once asking about God’s way of peace.

Cain was a worshipper of God; but there was no faith in Cain. There was no faith to recognise his own ruin and sin, no faith to apprehend the judgment of God against sin: he had no business in the presence of God as he was, no title to be a worshipper of God. He had not a bit of faith to recognise his own condition as driven out of paradise, his sin and estrangement from God, or, that blood—death—was necessary, in order for him to approach God. That is just the world’s worship; and are you any the better for it? Are you any the nearer to God? Tell me, dear friends, what if God does not receive your worship? Suppose that, after all your well doing and toil for God, God rejects it, for that is what Cain’s toiling met with from God— “Unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect” (v. 5)—would you be content?

How was it with Cain? “Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.” And it is ever thus. The moment God puts man on the true ground of his condition before Him, the enmity of the natural heart breaks out against God. Cain was “very wroth,” exceeding angry; and why? Because his heart was opposed to grace. He had not owned the first principle of sin in the presence of God.

And you, when the sovereign grace of the gospel comes to you, are “very wroth.” What! a man do his best, you exclaim, and not be accepted! So thought Cain. And so

thinks every man naturally; that is, he thinks that God must accept him just as well as he accepts God, bringing down God to his own measure of holiness. And then the wrath of man breaks out, and he rejects the righteousness that God holds out to him; he will not have His Son.

There is not a principle in Cain that is not found in you. There is no evil in brass and iron, nor is there any harm in sweet sounds; the evil and the sin are in this, that men are using these things to hide God from them. If you are worshippers of the true God, so was Cain. We may put a terrible name on that which we see in Cain, and yet approve of the same thing in ourselves; the light tells us that was sin in Cain which the spirit of self-love tells us is not sin in our own case. What difference is there between you and Cain? Take the Bible and see if you can make out any difference. The only real difference is this, that you have a further and more developed knowledge of “the Seed of the woman” (Christ), and therefore that of the two you are the more guilty.

Having sinned against God, abused His goodness, and refused His Son, man turns to please himself as if nothing had happened. It is more terrible to a spiritual eye to see insensibility after sin has been committed, it is a far deeper shade of sin than even the commission of the crime. The returning of a soul to God is just in the being awakened to a sense of the awfulness of this state.

There is yet another feature in the Cain character—open hostility to those who know God’s principle of grace, to those whom God does accept. See what follows: “And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass,

when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him," v. 8. Abel as a poor helpless man should have demanded Cain's sympathy, but Cain hates the one whom God delights in.

And so it is now. Why is it that you are so angry at a fault in a Christian which you readily excuse in a man of the world, if it be not hatred to the name he bears? If it ought to produce better fruits in him, why not adopt it yourselves? If you are expecting better from him than from the world, why not follow that which you profess to believe will produce the better fruit?

But you have not merely hated the name of Christ, you have been guilty of hating that which God has stablished in Christ. And here is the same principle that crucified Christ, the desperate recklessness of sin.

You cannot deny that the world has crucified Christ; God's Son is not now in the world. He has been in the world. He became a man amongst men ("the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," John 1:14)—our neighbour. Man saw and hated Him, and summed up his evil in killing Him. I ask you therefore, Has God no such question with you as He had with Cain, "Where is thy brother?" (v. 9). Christ has become man's "brother" (it is not the question of God's purpose and counsel here); and is not God demanding of the world, Where is Christ? Cain replied, "I know not: am I my brother's keeper?"

Here is a much worse character of sin than Adam's. It is the haughtiness and recklessness of sin. "Am I my brother's keeper? "Not only has there been sin against God, sin that has exiled man from Eden and separated him from the presence of God in peace, but there has been sin also that has led to the hatred and destruction

of a brother (blessed and perfect in His ways) whom man has seen. Your disclaiming this displays, and is the proof of, the recklessness of your hearts. “If I had not come and spoken unto them,” said Jesus, “they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause,” John 15:22-25.

The coming of the Son of man into the world has shewn the real state it is in. Why was Christ rejected by man, except that man hated God? That was the only reason that Christ was slain in this world. They hated God, and therefore they hated Him. They hated the light— “Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God,” John 3:20, 21. “They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil”; and this is their sin, that they have put the Light out of the world. Like Cain, they were “of that wicked one,” and slew their brother; 1 John 3:12.13 Like him too in the motive— “And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46). Even Pilate said, “I find no fault in him,” John 18:38; chap. 19:4, 6. The world14 has sinned against God in crucifying and slaying Jesus. They hated God, and therefore turned God’s Son out of the world, when sent to it in love.

But there is another thing. It is not simply a question of man's having killed the Lord Jesus Christ; the world has now to answer for its resistance of the Holy Ghost. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost," etc. The testimony of the Holy Ghost, present in the world as witness of the glory of Christ, is a conviction of the world of sin; John 16:7-15. He has been sent down because Christ has been killed. The necessary testimony of His very presence in the world is this: He would not have been here on earth if Christ had not been killed. He is come in condemnation of the whole world before God. 'I am here,' He says, as it were, 'because you have killed your Abel.' It is not a question about particular sins; you have killed God's Son, you are a sinner because you have not believed on Him.

Well then, dear friends, are you the daily companions of those who have rejected Christ, who have killed Christ? Are you of that world, and found with that world in its pleasures and profits, its religion and its lusts, which has done this, and which is still against God and against His Christ, vainly trying to make yourselves pleasant without God? Or have you taken your stand with those who are "of God," who have God with them and God for them, though the whole world that lieth in the wicked one be against them? The efforts that are being made merely to improve the world are but the sign of the insensibility of Cain. The Spirit of God is come into the world to awaken us to a sense of what has happened in the world, and of the truth of our condition as men.

How came poor Abel to be an accepted worshipper? "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain," etc. (v. 4). He

was accepted by blood. There was this testimony in his offering: I cannot go to God as I am; I am driven out of paradise, sin has come in between me and God, and death, “the wages of sin,” must come in between me and God, or I cannot go to God—I cannot go as I am. He took the place of a sinner, and put in faith between himself and God the blood of a victim that had been slain. Unless in his going to God he had owned his necessity that he could not get into the presence of God at all but by blood, he would not have been accepted any more than Cain. But he knew and owned that he could not get to God without blood: he was of faith, and faith ever sees that “without shedding of blood there is no remission,” Heb. 9:22. He put death—judicially inflicted death (by slaying the victim)— between himself and God, and then he comes into the presence of God as an accepted worshipper. “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh,” Heb. 11:4.

But further, Abel suffered with Christ. Having owned that he could not come into the presence of God without the blood of the lamb slain, he takes his place and portion with Christ in rejection. He is a sufferer from the wicked of the world. That is how it must end. That is all that the Christian is to expect at the hands of a world departed from God. “Marvel not if the world hate you,” 1 John 3:13.

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest,” says the apostle, “by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near,” etc.

(Heb. 10:19, 22). All who come not through Him are rejected, because they do not know that they are so utterly sinful that they cannot come into God's presence except through the blood of His Son. And on the other hand, all who say, I cannot draw near except through blood, see that it is the perfectness of love—God's own perfect blessed love—that to meet man's need spared nothing, not even His only-begotten Son. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. 5:21. This is the language of faith. He is the only God who, when I was the chief of sinners, gave His Son to die for me. I know of no God but a God of perfect love, bringing me out of all my vileness, hanging on my neck in my vileness, as did the father to the returning prodigal (Luke 15), and bringing me into His house to rejoice with Him in the exceeding riches of His grace.

We get perfect blessed peace through the blood of Christ, without one pang of conscience left. "The worshipper once purged has no more conscience of sin." Heb. 10. The apostle does not say that he is not a sinner, that he is not vile; but that God has so loved the vile and sinful as to give His Son unto death to wash away their vileness and their sin.

10 "What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself." (Luke 10:26, 27.)

11 "And Jehovah said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of

thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth [not merely, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake," etc. as to Adam], which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand: when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto Jehovah, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth," etc. (v. 9-14).

12 The believer is "not of the world"; his home and citizenship are in heaven, and his walk down here on the earth should be in the distinct consciousness, and in the distinct confession, that he "seeks a country" (Heb. 11:14). This is of the last importance: anything of the earth is of that which rejected Christ.

13 See John 8:40-47.

14 Not merely Jews are in question here; the world has done it, man has done it. "He was despised and rejected of men."

The Accepted Man

2 Corinthians 3

There are two ways in which we may approach the judgment of man. We may judge of where man is (of the condition in which he is looked at by God) by taking the word of God and applying it to the condition of man in himself, to his state as an actual sinner. Thus, for instance, in Genesis 3, in the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden we see the character of evil against God Himself; in Genesis 4, in Cain's sin, the character of evil against man's neighbour. Here then is direct opposition to the requirement of God in both its parts; Luke 10:27. But there is another thing of which Scripture is full—the accepted man, the Lord Jesus. We get in Him a precious living divine picture of what that Man is whom God does accept— of the Man after God's own heart.

If we find in Christ the accepted Man, whatever any other man's thoughts may be about himself, it is evident he is not this, because he is not like Christ (I speak not now as to divine power). In the glory Christ is the accepted and the acceptable Man before God. As the pattern for the saint He is the exhibitor, not of divine power in grace toward man, but of manhood such as God can accept. Now no man can at any rate lay claim to being this. The unconverted man, though he cannot comprehend the Man after God's own heart, can plainly see he is not this. A blind man may not be able to tell what I mean when I speak to him about light and colour, because he has no perception of these things, he is blind; but he knows that the things I am talking about he lacks the knowledge of. So, when Christ is spoken of, the

natural man is in a state of forgetfulness, or rather of ignorance as to who and what Christ is (whether looked at in relation to God or to the sinner), and therefore as to the real dissimilarity between himself and Christ; but he is perfectly aware that there are things which others know about Christ that he does not know. He may say he knows them, but he does not; and moreover he must be conscious that he does not know that which he professes to know. The blind man may hear me speak, or be listening to sweet music, and in a certain sense lose nothing through his blindness (in the present enjoyment of what he hears he may forget his inability to see); but let him attempt to walk across the room towards me, and he will be reminded of it; for, unless one lead him, he will run up against that which stands in his way. The blind man may get used to his blindness.

So with the sinner. When the natural man hears the word of God read, or when Christ is spoken of, he is blind, ignorant (as was said before) of who and what Christ is; but he is ignorant of the depth of his ignorance; his mind is so occupied with other things that he does not think about it, and he gets used to his ignorance. When the truth is put before him he cannot see it; yet he must know that he knows nothing about it. If he looks into the Scriptures, he does not apprehend Him of whom they speak. He is entirely ignorant of the motives that actuated Christ in His path through this world; yet, if his attention be at all called to what Christ was, he must have the consciousness that he is not like Him, that he is not and has not the thing spoken of.

If it be true that this is the acceptable Man, the Man in whom God delights—acceptable in His spirit, and ways, and character, it must be evident to the natural man that

he cannot be. He may have many amiable qualities (in nature there is much that is engaging and beautiful: we see it even in the animals) but nothing that is acceptable to God. Morally we do not find one single motive that governed Christ governing man, as man; it is evident, therefore, that if Christ's were acceptable motives, his are not.

Now being accepted is a great thing. It is impossible to think of a day of blessing, or of a day of judgment, without immediately having thoughts arise in the soul as to how it will be with us, whether we shall stand accepted in that day, whether we shall escape that judgment.

A man of the world must own that he has nothing in common with Christ, except indeed that he is a man and Christ was a man: he eats, drinks, sleeps; and Christ ate, drank, slept. But there is sin in every man, and Christ was "without sin" — sin in the place of godliness, malice in the place of love. As regards the moral motives of the soul, he has not any of Christ's, and Christ had not one of his. The world would cease if its conduct were regulated by the motives which actuated Christ; it could not go on an hour. There may be the outward imitation of that which was found in Christ; but God is not mocked. But, it may be said, and many do say it, God does not expect us to be like Christ in everything. Now the fact is, God does expect us to be like Christ. It is impossible for God to accept one thing as that which is agreeable to Himself, and then accept or be satisfied with the directly opposite. If the man of the world is the very opposite of what Christ was, God cannot accept him. He cannot deny Himself.

We shall see how God does bring into the very same place as Christ those who are accepted in Him. You cannot have a third man. You must have either the place of the first man, rejected, turned out into the world, in the place of ruin; or that of the second Man, accepted, brought out of the world to God. There is no third man offering an indefinite acceptance in some unknown condition.

What then is the Christian? We read here of two things as characterising him: he is an “epistle of Christ”; he has “liberty.” What is the “liberty”? You will find this a characteristic of man, as man, that he has not liberty with God, and (though he has not liberty from Satan) he has liberty with Satan. He is afraid of God; but he is not afraid of Satan. He would not like to be with Satan in hell, it is true; he is horrified at the thought of that; but he is not horrified at walking with him every day. He is at liberty with Satan, walking at his ease with him in the earth; but of walking with God he has a perfect terror. Now do you, dear friends, find yourselves at liberty with God? I know that in heaven by-and-by you would like to be with God; but do you covet this nearness now? That is the question. Do you feel at home with God? would you like Him to take you just such as you are? Taking you just such as you are, could you trust yourselves with God? You hope, perhaps, that when the day of judgment comes, all will be well with you; you have no thought but that you will be able to stand in the judgment then. But if God were about to take you just such as you are at this moment is there not something you would be afraid of? What is there so terrible in thinking about God, that you should be afraid of God, that you would not like to trust

God with your present condition? You are not afraid to trust Satan.

Satan is “the god” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince” (John 12:31; chap. 14:30) “of this world”; yet men are not afraid of making their way through a world where the Lord tells His disciples to have their loins girded about and their lamps burning, to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation, to be armed at all points. Men are not afraid there. Is not this strange? In Satan’s world they are at ease, but with God they are not at ease. They go readily into places of temptation where Christ is sure not to be; and in the place where Christ could honour God they are ill at ease. They go to seek their pleasures where Christ could not have found His; and they are not afraid of Satan, though they know he is there. They are afraid where the light is: but they are not afraid of the darkness. Darkness is their element; light their fear. Now that is a terrible thing! “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Satan is the prince of “the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Eph. 6:12), “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience,” etc. (Eph. 2:2, 3). Man can compare himself with the reprobate sinner, and take credit in his own eyes for the difference between himself and the sinner, when God is not in the conscience; but he puts away the judgment of God concerning himself, he never compares himself with Christ, “neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved,” John 3:20, 21. Now let us look at Christ, as to this judgment of man about himself. We find Christ scorning what man delights in, passing by those who could thus compare themselves amongst themselves, and becoming the friend of the profligate and the abandoned. When He met with a publican, or a

person of bad character, making no pretence to be anything but a sinner, He was at home with the sinner. Of such were His companions. He came in grace to sinners, as sinners. He saw into the heart, and therefore detected the hollowness of all man's pretended righteousness. He did not come from heaven to this earth to look for righteousness—that is the last thing He would have taken the journey for; He came to seek sinners.

Again, you read a person's character in his letter. Now the Christian is Christ's letter to the world. In verse 3 the apostle speaks of him as "the epistle of Christ," written by the Spirit of the living God in the fleshy tables of the heart, and contrasts him with the law written on tables of stone. A Christian is therefore a person upon whose heart the Spirit of God has engraved Christ, just as truly as God wrote and engraved the law upon the tables of stone; so that the world may read Christ in the man, as an Israelite might read the law on the stones. Now how far can we according to this definition call ourselves Christians? We come short, I doubt not, we have blotted the letter; but I speak of the thing in principle.

Oh the folly of man! he has taken for granted from the Scriptures that there is a heaven, and then sets about getting to that heaven his own way. How does he know that there is a heaven at all to go to? It is impossible that he should know it except upon the authority of God. I learn it from the Scriptures, he says: it is in the Scriptures, and therefore it must be true. Yes, doubtless it is in the Scriptures; but having taken for granted just that, he does not go to God to know who are to be there, or how he is to get there.

The very idea, fabulous as it is, he possesses of heaven, renders the assumption of his being there less pardonable than would have been his utter ignorance about it. A man would be less wrong, supposing he did not know anything about a regal palace (a savage, fit only for the woods), than a person who knew what the palace was, and had some idea of the requirements of the place, and yet thought to go and live there. The unconverted man acts and thinks more apart from God in thinking he ought to go to heaven, than if he thought there was no such place at all; he in a state of sin is expecting to get into the presence of a holy God!

One thing impressed my own mind most peculiarly when the Lord was first opening my eyes—I never found Christ doing a single thing for Himself. Here is an immense principle. There was not one act in all Christ's life done to serve or to please Himself. An unbroken stream of blessed, perfect, unfailing love flowed from Him, no matter what the contradiction of sinners—one amazing and unwavering testimony of love and sympathy and help; but it was ever others, and not Himself, that were comforted, and nothing could weary it, nothing turn it aside. Now the world's whole principle is self, doing well for itself; Psa. 49:18. Men know that it is upon the energy of selfishness they have to depend. Every one that knows anything at all of the world knows this. Without it the world could not go on. What is the world's honour? Self. What its wealth? Self. What is advancement in the world? Self. They are but so many forms of the same thing; the principle that animates the individual man in each is the spirit of self-seeking. The business of the world is the seeking of self, and the pleasures of the world are selfish pleasures. They are

troublesome pleasures too j for we cannot escape from a world where God has said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat breatf, till thou return to the ground,” etc. Toil for self is irksoihe; but suppose a man finds out at length that the busy seeking of self is trouble and weariness, and having procured the njieans of living without it, gives it up, what then? He just adopts another form of the same spirit of self, and turns to selfish ease.

I am not now speaking of vice and gross sin (of course every one will allow that to be opposite to the spirit of Christ); but of the whole course of the world. Take the world’s decent moral man, and is he an “epistle of Christ”? Is there in him a single motive like Christ’s? He may do the same things; he may be a carpenter as Christ was (Mark 6:3); but he has not one thought in common with Christ. As to the outside, the world goes on with its religion and its philanthropy; it does good, builds its hospitals, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and the like; but its inward springs of action are not Christ’s. Every motive that governed Christ all the way along is not that which governs men; and the motives which keep the world going are not those which were found in Christ at all.

The infidel owns Christ’s moral beauty, and selfishness can take pleasure in unselfishness; but the Christian is to “put on Christ.” He went about doing good all the day long; there was not a moment but He was ready as the servant in grace of the need of others. And do not let us suppose that this cost Him nothing. He had not where to lay His head; He hungered and was wearied; and when He sat down, where was it? Under the scorching sun, at the well’s mouth, whilst His disciples went into the city

to buy bread. And what then? He was as ready for the poor vile sinner who came to Him, as if He had not hungered, neither was faint and weary; John 4. He was never at ease. He was in all the trials and troubles that man is in as the consequences of sin, and see how He walked! He made bread for others; but He would not touch a stone to turn it into bread for Himself. As to the moral motives of the soul, the man of the world has no one principle in common with Christ. If then the world is to read in a Christian the character of Christ, it is evident the world cannot read it in him; he is not a Christian; he is not in the road to heaven at all, and every step he takes only conducts him farther and farther from the object in view. When a man is in a wrong road, the farther he goes in it the more he is astray.

There is another terrible thing: we find men agreeing to take the commandments of God as their rule and guide, as Christ took them. We take His directions, they say, all that God says about what we ought to be, and what we ought to do; we are not going our own way. Well, granted; but you must take the law, such as it is, and with its consequences. If man says, I accept the law to be judged by, I take this as my guide, he makes himself the responsible party, that is, he has to answer for himself. And mark how God began with the law. What does the law say about him? It says he is “cursed” already. This law that he is taking to get to heaven by is the very thing thing that pronounces judgment against him: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,” Gal 3:10. Suppose I bring a right and true measure to a man who is in the habit of using a wrong

measure, what do I do it for? Not to make him honest, but to prove his dishonesty. It is in vain for him to say, I will change my character; the thing is already done. The question is, has he a character? and he is proved to be a dishonest man. Now the law was given “that the offence might abound,” Rom. 5:20. The right, perfect, holy law of God was given as a rule; but if that rule be given to a sinner who cannot keep it, and if it be applied with all the searching power of the holiness of God, he is a judged person, and brought in under its curse. He hopes perhaps to be better; he has some vague thoughts about the mercy of God; but it is no use to talk about what he will be: judgment is already pronounced against him.

But more than this, as a matter of fact the law tells man not so much what he is to do, as what he is not to do. If we look at the ten commandments we shall find that they do not tell him to do anything, except to honour his father and his mother. That is the only positive precept. All the rest are, “Thou shalt not “do this, and thou shalt not do that. How comes it then that such a form is employed? This of itself is a sufficient proof of evil tendencies in those addressed. Men care not to make laws for a country to prohibit that which nobody thinks of doing; and so God’s law forbids people to do certain things because they have a tendency to do those very things; it touches the motives and dispositions of men’s hearts as they are known by God.

The law is given most surely as a rule; but it is given to a sinner who already needs amendment. The first thing it does therefore is to prove sin, condemning the inward disposition as well as the outward evil. Paul’s experience of it (Rom. 7) is proof enough of this. He could say he was pure so far as concerned outward compliance with

its requirements," touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," Phil. 3:6. "Alive without the law once," "when the commandment came, sin revived," and he died. "I had not known sin," he says, "but by the law, for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet; but sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence; for without the law sin was dead." "When the commandment came," he found he was a condemned sinner. The law, being the righteous demand of God from man, and applying itself to those who are already sinners, must necessarily work condemnation and death. It is "the ministration of death" (v. 7), and of "condemnation" (v. 9).

But, again, there are not only wrong motives in man, but a very strong independent will. Man likes to have his own way. Now what is the effect of putting anything in the way of a person who wants to go his own road? That he will push it out of the way if he can. Thus the will of man, if the man be resting on the law as such, and yet liking to have his own way in a single thing, proves him to be a breaker of all the commandments. The will of the man, being contrary to God, if opposed, would push aside the whole law. This is what is meant by "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," etc. (James 2:10,11.) The authority of God is attached to His law; and therefore, if, when the authority of God meets the lusts of man, he is guilty of the breach of that law in one thing, he has overthrown the claim of the authority of God, and thus broken the whole law. If he commit not adultery, yet if he kill, he sets aside the authority of Him who made the law that says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; for He that

said, “Do not commit adultery,” said also, “Do not kill.” Suppose you had forbidden your child to do three things, and he was not disposed to do two of the three, or lacked the opportunity, would his not having done two of these three things make you hold him guiltless? No; you would say that he was not disposed to do them, or he would have done them had he found the occasion. Having set aside your authority in the one instance, your authority was not his restraint.

How hard it is, you may be ready to say, that man when a sinner should have a law given him to keep, which he cannot keep, and which therefore, after all, instead of helping him, only works death and condemnation. These are man’s thoughts and not God’s. God never intended to save man by the law: that was not His purpose in giving it. He never meant to save any other way than by Christ. Bounds were set about the mount (Ex. 19:12, 13) —it is a barrier from God; and Moses required to have a veil put on his face when he spoke to the people; Ex. 34:33-35.

People have taken the idea of heaven from the Scriptures, and then they have taken their own way to it. But they are trying to go to heaven by the very thing God has given as the ministration of death and condemnation; and they expect to get there by the very thing God says pronounces them “cursed.”

The first principle of Christianity, whilst recognising in the most solemn manner man’s responsibility to answer for himself, puts the Christian on other and entirely different ground. This is the first principle and basis of all Christian truth, that there is a Mediator—a third person, between man and God. Another has implicated

Himself, and, because man could not come to God, has taken up the cause of man, and worked out an acceptance for him.

Two things (already noticed) are brought out here, as the result of this. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” the liberty of grace. And we become the “epistles of Christ” (blotted ones, no doubt, in ourselves, but we are not epistles of ourselves), transcripts of Christ “written with the Spirit of the living God.” This we “are,” not merely we ought to be. Though in ourselves most imperfect and failing, the definition given by the Spirit of God of a Christian is that he is a transcript of Christ.

Now the natural thought of many a soul is this, ‘Well, if that be true, I do not know what to think of myself; I do not see this transcript in myself! ‘No, and you ought not to see it. Moses did not see his own face shine. Moses saw God’s face shine, and others saw Moses’ face shine. The glory of the Lord, as seen in Moses’ face, alarmed the people. They could not bear that glory. But we see it now with “open,” unveiled “face” in Christ (v. 18), and yet are not in the least afraid; we find liberty, comfort, and joy in looking at it; we gaze on it, and, instead of fearing, rejoice. How comes this immense difference? It is “the ministration of the Spirit,” (v. 8), and “of righteousness” (v. 9).

It is Christ alive in the glory that I see; not Christ down here (sweet as that was), but Christ at the right hand of God. Yet though that glory is in the heavens, I can stedfastly behold it. All that glory (and He is in the midst of the glory and majesty of the throne of God itself) does not affright me, because this wonderful truth comes in,

that that glory of God is in the face of a man who has put away my sins, and who is there in proof of it; Heb. 1:3. I should have been afraid to hear His voice, and have said with the children of Israel (Ex. 20:19), “Let not God speak with us”; or, like Adam with a guilty conscience, have sought to hide myself away; Gen. 3:8. But I do not say so now; no, let me hear His voice. I cannot see the glory of Christ now without knowing that I am saved. How comes He there? He is a man who has been down here mixing with publicans and sinners, the friend of such, choosing such as His companions. He is a man who has borne the wrath of God on account of sin; He is a man who has borne my sins in His own body on the tree (I speak the language of faith); He is there, as having been down here amidst the circumstances, and under the imputation of sin; and yet it is in His face I see the glory of God. I see Him there consequent upon the putting away of my sin, because He has accomplished my redemption. I could not see Christ in the glory if there was one spot or stain of sin not put away. The more I see of the glory, the more I see the perfectness of the work that Christ has wrought, and of the righteousness wherein I am accepted. Every ray of that glory is seen in the face of One who has confessed my sins as His own, and died for them on the cross; of One who has glorified God in the earth, and finished the work that the Father had given Him to do. The glory that I see is the glory of redemption. Having glorified God about the sin— “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” —God has glorified Him with Himself there; John 17.

When I see Him in that glory, instead of seeing my sins, I see that they are gone. I have seen my sins laid on the

Mediator. I have seen my sins confessed on the head of the scapegoat, and they have been borne away; Lev. 16. So much has God been glorified about my sins (that is, in respect of what Christ has done on account of my sins), that this is the title of Christ to be there, at the right hand of God. I am not afraid to look at Christ there. Where are my sins now? where are they to be found in heaven or on earth? I see Christ in the glory. Once they were found upon the head of that blessed One; but they are gone, never more to be found. Were it a dead Christ, so to speak, that I saw, I might fear that my sins would be found again; but with Christ alive in the glory the search is in vain. He who bore them all has been received up to the throne of God, and no sin can be there.

As a practical consequence of this I am changed into His likeness— “We all, with open face beholding, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” It is the Holy Ghost taking of the things of Christ, and revealing them to the soul, that is the power of present practical conformity to Christ. I delight in Christ, I feast upon Christ, I love Christ. It is the very model and forming of my soul according to Christ, by the Holy Ghost—this His revelation of Christ. I not only get to love the glory, it is Christ Himself that I love; Christ, that I admire; Christ, that I care for; Christ, whose flesh I eat, and whose blood I drink—what wonder if I am like Christ? The Christian thus becomes the epistle of Christ; he speaks for Christ, owns Christ, acts for Christ. He does not want to be rich, he has riches in Christ—unsearchable riches. He does not want the pleasures of the world, he has pleasures at God’s right hand for evermore.

Does the heart still say, Oh, but I do not, and cannot see this transcript in myself? No, but you see Christ; and is not that better? It is not my looking at myself, but it is my looking at Christ, that is God's appointed means for my growing in the likeness of Christ. If I would copy the work of some great artist, is it by fixing my eyes on the imitation, and being taken up with regrets about my failing attempt, that I shall be likely to succeed? No, but by looking at my model, by fixing my eyes there, tracing the various points and getting into the spirit of the thing. Mark the comfort of this! The Holy Ghost having revealed to my soul Christ in the glory as the assurance of my acceptance, I can look without fear, and therefore stedfastly, full at that glory, and rejoice at the measure of its brightness. Stephen (Acts 7), full of the Holy Ghost, could look up stedfastly into heaven (doubtless in his case it was with more than ordinary power), and see the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and His face shone as the face of an angel. And look at his death. Just like his Master, he prays for his very murderers. Stephen died saying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"; Christ had died saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." In him there was the expression of Christ's love for his enemies. By the Holy Ghost he was changed, and that in a very blessed way too, into the same image.

The soul at perfect liberty with God looks peacefully and happily at the glory of God as seen in the face of Jesus Christ; and because it sees that glory and knows its expression, it walks before God in holy confidence. Instead of being happy and at liberty with Satan in Satan's world, the Christian dreads Satan because he knows himself. At ease in the presence of God, he there

drinks into the spirit of that which befits the presence of God, and becomes the “epistle of Christ” to the world, shewing out to all that he has been there.

Well, what a difference! May we more and more make our boast in Him, in whose face all this glory is displayed—the Lamb, who has died for us, and cleansed away our sins by His own most precious blood.

The Lord give us hearts freed by Himself, whilst still in the midst of this poor world that is walking in a vain show.

Moses Veiled, And The Glory Of God In The Face Of Jesus Christ

2 Corinthians 3; 4:6

The apostle has been led to speak of himself (as he says, afterwards, chapter 12, “I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me,” etc.) by reason of special circumstances at the time at Corinth. He had been forced to speak of himself, in order to maintain the truth of the gospel he had preached, and to make good (not for his own sake, but for theirs to whom he wrote) the authority of his apostleship. He says, at the close of the epistle, “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you … examine yourselves,15 whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves,” etc. (chap. 13:3-7). So here, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink,” etc. Themselves were a proof of his service. There was the epistle that recommended his ministry, and to which his heart turned. It evidently led at once to the truth of the gospel which he preached.

In doing this he contrasts the church of God with the tables of the law, and puts the church of God in the place of (as answering to, in that sense) the tables of the law, presenting Christ to the world; just as, in the letter written and engraven on stone, there had been a presentation to Israel of God’s mind in what He required

from man. (See verses 3-11.) He predicates of the latter, that it was the ministration of death and condemnation; thereupon, speaking of the value and importance of the gospel, and, as a necessary consequence, of the plainness and clearness with which it had been set forth.

It is plain, that the whole question, the great thing to be done—if ever there is to be the knowledge of peace, salvation, and eternal life in the soul—is to have the soul brought into connection with God Himself. If to know Him is life, to be near Him, to have the consciousness of His favour and loving-kindness, is better than life; it is quite evident, that the whole work to be done is to bring the soul really, livingly, into connection with God Himself, into the conscious presence of God.

After all, what the believer finds practically difficult is to abide there. Abiding there, we cannot be in the unnatural state (unnatural, that is, in the highest sense of the word) of questioning whether or not God is our Father—whether we belong to God. Is it the natural state for His creatures to be in rebellion against Him? Alas! it is our natural state, as fallen: still, speaking in the highest sense, it is a most unnatural state. And it is surely most unnatural for us to be questioning our Father’s love to us, if His children. Our only natural state, as recipients of grace, is conscious nearness to God. What is the natural state for a child to be in? Not that of calling in question whether its parents are its parents, but one of undivided, conscious, unsuspecting certainty that they are; one of freedom from all suspicion of their love. Well, what would be the natural state of things as it regards the creatures of God? An unsuspecting state of conscious happiness with Him from whom all blessing flows.

It is evident, if God be love, to be uncertain of His favour is not to know Him. If I suspect a person, it is because I do not know him, or, knowing, have cause to mistrust him (it may be so with man, we may reasonably suspect man). The great thing we have to see in the word of God is: Is there such a plain, clear, distinct, blessed revelation of what God is, that He may be known such as He is? Then we shall confide in Him; or, if He be not known, it is a proof of thorough blindness. Is there such a full revelation of God—of what He is in Himself and of His actings in love, of what He is and of what He has done—as to put those who believe the revelation into conscious favour with God? If there is the hope of this mercy, and the desire for it in the heart, uncertainty will be misery; but if the revelation be clear, if light be light, darkness is darkness; uncertainty as to what God is (in the revelation) is blindness in us. Many things may come in to disturb and trouble, as sin, the power of Satan, etc.; but there can be no question about favour with God.

The apostle declares it is the character of that which he speaks of here to produce “liberty.” The law, whatever it was, did not that. Nothing but grace, nothing but the perfect revelation of what God is, could do that. Anything out of God is imperfect; but, if God is love, His actings are perfect love, the expression and reflection of what He is. The law was not that (the apostle has spoken of the law); so far as it went it was a revelation of God, but its character was that of requisition, from the unchanged heart, of what the heart had not; and, therefore, “the letter (he says) killeth.” It was the ministration of death and condemnation.

But this is not all. Even though a great deal of grace accompanied the law, so long as the law was such as it was, it was necessarily obscure in its revelation of God; the blending of the two, the exhibition of the goodness of God with the presence of the claims of the law (that is, with the question of what man was), could only lead to misery, wretchedness, and darkness of soul. So long as the question remained, 'What are you for God? are you what you ought to be?' so long as it was not a revelation of unmingled grace—of that which did not, and would not, and could not, mingle itself with anything else, it could only condemn. The revelation of God's demands on man must condemn. No matter how much grace mingles itself with it—nay, the more the kindness and goodness of God—the greater the obligation of man to answer to it, and the greater the sense of the sin of man in not meeting the character of God thus revealed. If it is it not all grace, you must be condemned; if it is anything but pure simple grace, you must take up the question of what man is, that God is dealing with; and then it is all over with you, for God cannot depart from what He ought to be, as holy.

Man has failed in everything. But that disarms not grace. It is the occasion of grace, not the source but the occasion of grace. Now, God says, I must act for myself, I must manifest what I am. Grace has this character; it is not simply love (it is perfectly love, but it is not simply love); it is love acting where evil already is, and towards that which is evil. There is perfect love between the Father and the Son, but that is not grace. God loves the angels, but you cannot call that grace. Grace is the exercise of this same perfect holy love towards that which is totally unworthy of it. It is this new wonder

come out—love acting when the occasion for it was in the faults and sins of those towards whom it acts. This evidently sets aside the question of what the sinner is (save indeed as the need for, and enhancing, the grace); but grace does not set aside the holiness of the law, it exalts the law.

The revelation of grace in a measure (that is, unless it be in the fulness and perfectness of its own glory—God's love to the sinner in Christ) only enhances the sin of man, and makes his responsibility and condemnation the greater. And this is not mere abstract reasoning: God has brought it all out in His dealings. When Moses put a veil over his face, as referred to by the apostle here, it was not when it was pure law.

When Moses came down from the mount the first time and broke the tables (Ex. 32), there was no veil. That was all on the supposition of there being the possibility of relationship between the people and God on the ground of law. He had nothing to do but to break the tables, since all relationship on that ground was gone. He could not give them to Israel (they had made the golden calf); so he broke them. He goes up again, (v. 30), saying, "Peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin," and says to the Lord, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written." To this the Lord answers, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book," etc. Then (chap. 33:12-23), we find Moses, emboldened by his knowledge of the exceeding lovingkindness of God, interceding again. He beseeches God to shew him His glory; and God (in answer to Moses' prayer), says, "I will

make all my goodness pass before thee," etc. This is not merely law. Moses hidden in a cleft of the rock (chap. 34), the Lord passes by before him, and proclaims, "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 fourth generation." In a certain sense, that was grace; not the sovereign grace of God which we know in Christ, but His "goodness." It is well to observe, in passing (this being often quoted, as a general statement of what God is), that it is not a revelation of what God is in grace, as now presented to sinners. There are certain things in it, in which there is a partial revelation of grace; but it is not a statement of the mode in which God now deals with sinners; nor a general revelation of God's character, but of the terms on which He governed Israel. He had not taken them from under law; after that He gives the law again. When Moses goes up, saying, "Peradventure I shall make an atonement for you," No, says the Lord, "whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book"; that is, I will make every one that sinneth responsible for his own sin.

What is the consequence of that? It is quite true that Moses' face reflects the glory of the Lord, which it did not the first time. When Moses had been up in the mount forty days and forty nights, his face did not shine; but when he had been hidden in the rock, and the goodness of Jehovah had passed before him, he comes down with his face shining. The law never made a man's face shine. Yet, with all this reflection of the goodness of

God—of His glory, if you please, but of His goodness ("I will make all my goodness," etc.), the law is given again. Two more tables of stone are hewn (chap. 34:1), and God says, "Make thee an ark of wood, and I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark," Deut. 10:1-5. It was broken the first time: how could he go and put the tables of the law by the golden calf—the ten commandments in the camp along with the sin which had already violated the law, the very first word of which was, "I am Jehovah thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; thou shalt have no other gods before me"?

The law set up again, Moses comes down from the mount with his face shining (himself unconscious of all this shining), and the people, when they see it, afraid to come nigh, are obliged to ask him to put a veil over his face. The sight of the glory brought a sense of condemnation, and they prayed that it might be taken from them. This it is that the apostle refers to (v. 7, 13).

When there was a mixture of grace and law, an exhibition of the goodness of God along with the presence of the claims of the law (the law put in the ark, its holiness still insisted on), the consequence was, that Moses must hide the glory: they could not bear to look upon his face. It was only condemnation and death to them. And it is always so, when there is a question of seeking fruit from man. If the Son Himself comes and looks for fruit, the end of that will be, He will send His armies and destroy the husbandmen; Matt. 21, 22. A mixture of law and grace ends in greater disaster than law; man is more guilty than if there had been no goodness at all.

That is the thing that was, says the apostle, and it was the ministration of death, and of condemnation. When the veil was put upon Moses' face, it was not pure law, but grace and law; and it ended in the rejection of Israel. "Their minds were blinded, for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." It is related in the history, that, when Moses went into the holy place, he took the veil off; when he came out unto the people, he put the veil on; Ex. 34:34, 35. So in the end with Israel. "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake," etc. (Jer. 31:31-34). In the end the veil shall be taken away.

Not only, as it regards the law, is there conviction of sin through it, and thus not any possibility of relationship between man and God on the ground of it, where it is simply law, but there is an impossibility of man's being in connection with God as the source of happiness, save on the ground of pure grace that sets aside altogether what the sinner is. There is often more difficulty in seeing this. Unless it be pure simple grace, the only other idea we can have is that God requires something; and if God requires anything, the more the grace and the goodness shown, the more guilty and failing are we, and the greater our condemnation; it only increases

responsibility. If it is a mixture of law with goodness, man cannot bear to look at it.

But then we come to another thing. What we find here is not law, though the holiness of the law is maintained and secured. The veil is taken off. There is no veil at all: “We all with open face, beholding the glory of the Lord,” etc. And what is the consequence? Boldness, where there is faith. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

“Seeing then that we have such hope,” says the apostle, “we use great plainness of speech, and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished,” etc.; and again, “Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” There is no hiding, no concealment: God comes out such as He is in His holiness, majesty, and glory, and, blessed be His name! in His love too. “But,” he adds, “if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,” etc.

This is the declaration of the apostle. There is no veil whatever now upon the revelation of God, and the consequence is, if it is not seen, it is the condemnation of those who see it not. All the glory of God—what He is, and in His ways and actings—is now perfectly revealed; and, if this does not reach the conscience and affections, and put in unsuspecting relationship with God, the man is lost. Because, if God is thus perfectly revealed, he can have no connection with God. Nothing but the revelation

of God could put man into connection with God. In Moses it was hidden, darkened; but now there is nothing more to reveal, for there is no veil, no hiding of God, and the man is lost. Nothing else can be done. So Hebrews 10:26, “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”: a man rejecting that must be lost. He may reason against it, seek to disprove it, prove that there is no glory: well, what has he done? Proved this to his own satisfaction, and rejected the counsel of God against himself. There is not another gospel. The whole thing is out now. Nothing else can bring back man into relationship with God. There cannot be another gospel, if all that God is has been perfectly revealed. This is a most solemn but a most blessed thought. We are set in connection with a God fully known. There is not any uncertainty. There is not anything can come out now, as to what God is, or as to His ways and actings, that has not been made known; all is perfectly manifested in the revelation of Himself in Christ Jesus. What is the consequence of this full revelation of God? To put in a known and settled relationship with God.

When God revealed Himself to Israel, it was a question of terms of relationship between Himself and a people already in relationship, already formed, and recognised as such. Whenever this (as with nominal Christians, where it is not a matter of conversion of heart) is assumed to be the case, we always find persons putting themselves on a ground partly of law and partly of grace —a mixture of goodness and responsibility, and not on that of what God is. He had brought up Israel out of Egypt and to Himself (Ex. 19), and having shewn His mighty power and goodness, He puts them under law, as the terms of relationship with a people then before Him

there; as a people surrounding the Mount to hear these terms of relationship.

But the gospel goes upon other ground. It sees man dead in trespasses and sins—Jew and Gentile alike. "There is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," Rom. 3:23. If the nature of man is looked at, there is no difference; in the flesh good does not dwell. And so says Paul, "Among whom we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as other," Eph. 2:3. The gospel treats all men on the common ground of not being in relationship with God. The Gentiles were in "ignorance" (Acts 17), not as Israel in relationship with God; and "the times of this ignorance God winked at." God was not dealing with the Gentile world then. "But now [He] commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained," etc. Now God is publicly revealed, and therefore, if He is publicly revealed, the consequence is that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness," Rom. 1:18. This manifestation of God brings out into full light all the evil, darkness, enmity, and wickedness of man (the light brings out into view the darkness); all his selfishness, carnality, pride, evil lusts, desire of gain, and the like, are brought fully out in their opposition to God. It is the full revelation of God which levels man, because it brings all men, Jew and Gentile alike, into one sweeping condemnation of having come short of the glory of God, and places them on a

common ground of being “alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them,” etc. As regards standing with God, there is a perfectly common ground. That is where man stands now; and upon this ground God takes man up. There is the occasion of grace. It is the fulness of the revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ (the very thing that has manifested man’s full alienation from God and opposition of heart against Him), that introduces into full confidence in God.

There is not one tittle of requirement now, no seeking of fruit from man. Of course there is fruit produced in those who have received grace. “A sower went forth to sow,” etc. (Matt. 13). This is a very different thing from requiring fruit. People confound requiring fruit from man with the blessed truth that there are fruits of the Spirit; but the fruits of the Spirit are not the fruits of the man. If I go to a bad tree, expecting fruit, I cast away all the fruit as bad fruit; but if I graft it, that is quite a different thing. Many a person fancies that, in mixing law and holiness together with grace, he is going to maintain holiness. No! he maintains unholiness, because he lets not in that full revelation of God which shews out man in all his unlikeness to God. We must not suppose that grace is an allowance of sin; we cannot separate the holiness of God from His grace.

God does not come and tell us that He expects something from man; He tells that which will trouble us a great deal more—that man has failed in meeting His requirements. “I will take away the hedge of my vineyard, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste” (Isaiah 5). He had planted a hedge, and He required fruit. He was well entitled to require fruit:

“What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?” But when He looked for grapes, it brought forth wild grapes. He has tried requiring fruit, but man has not produced it; He has found too much bad fruit to require it again. Do not then pretend to maintain the claims of God; if you do, you must satisfy them. Leave God to vindicate His righteousness in that day; and if you talk about holiness and righteousness, produce them. It is all too late to stand on that ground; if God require anything, we are lost for ever.

That being the case, we come to see how it is the apostle could “use great plainness of speech.” “We preach, not ourselves,” he says, “but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

It is a very blessed as well as a most solemn thought, that we have to do with a God fully revealed, as also who knows all the secrets of our hearts. Are our souls at peace with God? Are we in the full, unsuspecting, blessed confidence of the favour of God, that flows from God thus known in perfect grace? There should not be a suspecting thought. That is the true state of a Christian; he may have to blame himself as to many a thing, but he has never a doubt in his soul of the divine and blessed favour of God towards him. It is perfect grace. When Jesus was on earth He could not let out the fulness of it — “I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished!” Death had not come in; atonement had riot been wrought. He could not go and present to God that which let open the flood-gates that the love of God might flow out in all its fulness. The

death of Christ did not procure it; but the death of Christ must be there, as the only means by which it could flow out.

That is where we see the unclouded fulness of God's love. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." There is nothing to be learnt about God but what is revealed and fully told out. He who has borne all the sin is in the presence of God. The question of sin has been settled; it has been gone through with God. Christ being in the presence of God, it is there we see the unveiled glory. It is there Paul saw Him. There we see Him. "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," Rom. 5. We are standing in grace, a present grace. It is not merely that Christ has done something that has put away our past sins; we are to "reckon ourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ," Rom. 6. "Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For, in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." I have a right to say, I am dead, and alive unto God.

The place where I see the glory is not Moses' face—not in one who says, "I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin" with God, who says, No, every man shall bear his own sin— "whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." That is not the case now. The glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ, who does not say "Peradventure," etc., but who makes the atonement before He goes up; and the glory seen in the face of Jesus Christ is proof that the atonement has been

accepted. I am at home in the presence of the glory, happy there. That which condemned me before is now peace. Beholding it, I am changed into the same image. Every ray of it is joy and peace to my soul, an evidence that there is no question of sin now. It is “the gospel of the glory of Christ.” His was not a mere visit to man in his sorrows and sins to put him to the test. He did come seeking for fruit; but besides that, He did much more; and now, as the apostle says, light shines. “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Again, “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” It is there the glory of God is seen, it is in Christ — “the face of Jesus Christ.” It is the declaration of the full revelation of all that God is in His holiness, and glory, and love, consequent upon the atonement made by Christ, and the glorification of Christ. Thus all questioning is ended. When we see it, we can look steadily and peacefully at it, and we are transformed into the same image. There is no darkness there at all (i John 1:5); and, beloved, if there is no darkness at all, all sin is condemned. “God is light”: yes, but He is “love,” and I see it in the putting away of my sins. God was alone with Christ when the work was going on. He has hid me in the cleft of the rock; and He has taken off His hand, and I can trace, in the work that has been done, the perfectness of the love that has left no sin to be atoned for. God gives the privilege of not intruding the remembrance even of sin to defile the place of His holiness.

But again, it is most important that all sin should be confessed; as regards our walk down here, we have constantly to acknowledge our short-comings; but then we have Jesus above (not to procure righteousness—that is done, but) to maintain our intercourse and communion with God in the light, whilst we are in our weakness. Nothing else would do, because we are in the light. God is light; and whatever cannot stand in the presence of the glory of God, whatever is not according to that light, is sin. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”; but my sins have not hindered my seeing the glory of God; nay, rather, they are the occasion of the full manifestation of His glory.

Can you stand there? No! perhaps you answer, it is presumption to think of it! If so, your gospel does not save you. He that trusts in Christ can stand therein. It is the fulness of divine favour, present grace, wherein we stand. Are our souls standing there in the presence of God? or are we mingling holiness and grace? There is no mingling with God; but perfect holiness and perfect love.

15 By the certainty of their own Christianity, which they did not doubt, they were to be assured of his apostleship.

The Church In The Wilderness In The Vision Of God

Numbers 24

All this statement of Balaam is of what God would do with His people.16 Behind Israel's failure God takes up His own thoughts, and acts in His own ways, about them.

Firstly they are a peculiar people, separate from all other nations unto God; chap. 23:9. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Secondly, God will see no evil in them; chap. 23:21. In the end, Israel will be the testimony that "His mercy endureth for ever."

Thirdly, we have the way in which their beauty and comeliness are seen, as looked at in "the vision of the Almighty," chap. 24:5-9. It is not man's sight of them, but God's.

Fourthly, speaking of the glory of Israel in connection with Christ in the latter days (chap. 24:15-25), Balaam says, "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession: Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city." Then he looks at the nations and says, "Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish for

ever." Of the Kenites, "Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock; nevertheless, the Kenite shall be wasted until Asshur shall carry thee away captive… Alas! who shall live when God doeth this? "The whole power, pride, and energy of the Gentiles is smitten. The "Star," the "Sceptre," arises, and delivers Israel. The pride of man is brought down, and Christ is set up. And there is the world's history. The great truth of all history is in its connection with God. His people being brought out before the Gentiles, He shews, in the great result, that His gifts and callings are without repentance; Rom. 11. Though He may not interfere for a long time, yet in the end it will be seen that He has taken notice of all that the nations have done; and Christ, in whom His glory and purposes centre, shall be set up King upon His holy hill of Zion; Psalm 2.

In chapter 24 we get out of the region of conflict and questioning into the place where God can look upon His people in their loveliness and beauty: to us the beauty of the church in all Christ's perfectness. The preceding chapter gives us their separation and justification. As looked at by God (and therefore by faith), the church is dead and risen with Christ. We are quickened together with Him (He having borne all our sins), as out of the grave, where our sins were left. But where the fulness and finishedness of acceptance in Christ17 is not known, anxiety and despondency result in the heart of the saint, on the discovery of sin within, and he questions whether he is such. He does see iniquity—he is conscious from the teaching of God that iniquity is in his heart. It is not merely a natural consciousness of sins: the Spirit of God gives him a divine understanding of sin, and of what it is. The power of God's holiness is set up as a throne in

the conscience, and he judges himself, as though he were himself to be judged for it. We constantly find souls in this state, miserable, distressed, and anxious, questioning whether they are saved; whether they are in the faith. Now how is this to be disposed of? Clearly not by the taking away of the Spirit, whose work has produced this discovery of sin, but by the eye being directed elsewhere entirely; that is, to the work of Christ for him. It is not by the pulling down of the throne set up within that nearly drove him to despair. By looking to the work of Christ the standard of holiness is exalted, but he sees that he is made the righteousness of God in Christ, and he gets rest. The nearer he is to God, the less will he get rest otherwise, so long as God is God. He is taught to look entirely out of himself, and to understand that the righteousness of God is his by faith in Jesus Christ. When man is manifested to himself, he sees that he is wretched (Rom. 7:24), but man being proved to be bad, this gives way to God's righteousness, etc. The last Adam takes the place of the first in respect of life and judgment. In everything this is true. It will be fully realised in the glory by and by; but faith does not wait for that. Faith does not take even conscience's view of the matter, but God's view, and rests there. The church is seen in God's presence and in God's sight; as here He "has not seen iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel." Paul, looked at in himself, was "chief" of sinners; 1 Tim. i:15.

Israel had gone through the wilderness with constant failure, but at the end of the forty years' journey, when Satan resists their entrance into Canaan, God does not see iniquity in them. Moses had said of them in these very plains of Moab, "Ye have been rebellious against

the Lord from the day that I knew you." But God sees no iniquity; He sees no perverseness.

Experience is not faith. You cannot know an object of faith by experience, you may know yourself by experience. But the experience of what passes in my soul is not faith. I want faith for that which is revealed (that is, in the revelation of God) and not a revelation. No doubt it is felt experimentally, it is not merely a matter of theory. Many a one who had by faith got peace, when he sees his sins again, loses peace. He may have received the grace of the gospel very sincerely; yet, in measure his knowledge of it is superficial. He does not see it is applicable to his state. Faith looks not at itself but at God's righteousness in Christ: His grace has judged the whole condition of the sinner; and, resting in His revelation, the soul stands in the consciousness of redemption.

Has God planted us in this condition merely to say, I am safe? Is this the end of God? Surely not! But this peace is the basis on which all happy intercourse with God goes on. He cannot have such intercourse with me while He is judging me. Take, by way of example, the parent dealing with a naughty child—there is no intercourse in that; nor can there be any until the child is restored. Correction is not communion. The Holy Ghost's thoughts and revelations are founded on the righteousness God has set the church in in Christ. God has redeemed her—"brought her out of Egypt"18 —charged Himself with the question of her sins. It is not that we should work up to a certain righteousness: there is not a question of righteousness to be allowed. God's side of the matter begins there. We may know terrors first, and it may be

well that we should; but God begins with having the church.

See Ephesians 5:25-27: “Husbands, love your wives, even as 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.” He has loved it, and given Himself for it, that He might work in and about it what He would like to have it. He presents it to Himself, not merely as purified, but more, “a glorious church.” Well now, our souls ought to follow this; we should start from the point whence God starts—His determination to bless, as it is said, “And when Balaam saw that it pleased Jehovah to bless Israel.” This foils Satan.

To return. Balaam goes not now as at other times to seek for enchantments. He finds himself in the presence of God, and Satan and Balaam can do nothing. “There is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel.” So in our case; when it is manifest that God has the church, Satan can do nothing. It is a settled thing. The church is to be a blessed church, and the Holy Ghost can take His stand there, and occupy Himself with her portion, and set before the soul her beauty and glory which are of God.

But Balaam set his face “towards the wilderness” — why? Because the children of Israel were yet in the wilderness. The wilderness was not Canaan, but Israel was there. The world is not heaven nor the glory, but the church is there now; and while the church is in the wilderness, the Spirit of God can take up the parable

and shew what the church is in God's eye. So here, Balaam is not walking through the tents of Israel, or he would have heard the murmurings and discontent of Israel. He is not in the camp, he is gone up to the top of the hill, and, looking at them with God's eye, what does he see? Israel abiding in their tents according to their tribes. The Spirit of God comes upon him,19 and he takes up his parable and says, "Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel," etc.

We have to look at God's thoughts about the church. The Holy Ghost speaks of the church, as to what it is to God; and God's thoughts are not merely of the glory of the church in the world to come, but of the beauty, in His mind, of the people in the wilderness.

Would we have happy thoughts about the saints? we must rise up to what the church of God really is to God. We must get "the vision of the Almighty" (the knowledge of the beauty and comeliness of the church in all Christ's perfectness), in order to have our souis soft and tender and humble about what passes around. If we do not see this, we shall not be able to maintain the sense of Christ's love. And, further, unless by the power of the Spirit we get away from circumstances, so as to see the church, and the saints individually, as Christ sees them, instead of seeking to nourish and cherish them, as Christ does, we shall be disappointed. This often makes us angry: it should not, but it does. We shall either lower our standard and be content with conformity to the world in the saints, or become discontented and judicial,

angry and bitter against them, the flesh being disappointed and vexed. Faith assumes the acceptance of the saints in Christ, while it seeks in the exercise of godly and gracious discipline that they should be maintained and bloom in the fragrance of Christ's grace.

"As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which Jehovah hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters." What a most blessed picture! And could we be happy in seeing them stunted, dishonouring the Lord? The glory of Christ is concerned, for His character is to be seen in us. Paul says to the saints at Corinth (not, Ye ought to be, but), "Ye are the epistle of Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God." No, I must grieve when I find in them that which is contrary to their beauty in Christ. They are "as trees of lign aloes," and as "cedar trees." It is not merely that God has not seen iniquity in them—He has seen beauty.

Israel were in the wilderness, their enemies all around; but for all that, the table is spread for them in the presence of their enemies; and here are God's thoughts about them, thoughts of comeliness and goodlincss; they were "as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes … as cedar trees by the rivers of waters." "Thou shah make them drink of the river of thy pleasures," Psalm 36:8. What an unlikely place, the wilderness, in which to look for rivers of waters! "He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted."

Balaam was in the very presence of Balak, who would have done anything to bring a curse on the people; and

he says, “God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.”

And this is what we have to see in the church, spite of Satan. Though in the wilderness, and in the presence of its enemies, a table is spread for it there. Spite of all the power of Satan, the beauty of the church is this—not in the glory, because there it is not in the presence of Satan; not in the rest, but now—the display of the efficacy of the calling and of the power of God in the presence of Satan, in the very place where Satan rules. The church is set in the efficacy of the fulness of Christ’s work. It has failed. But, unless the soul has the consciousness of redemption—the fulness of redemption in Christ, it cannot see this.

We should know that we are the Lord’s “garden”; we should have in the wilderness the consciousness of being planted as God’s “trees,” and not merely of being saved. God has set rivers of water to flow there—not thence, but there—that though in a dry place, the church should bear testimony to the perfectness of Christ’s work, to the infiniteness of the efficacy of Christ’s death. What a marvellous miracle of grace is the acceptance of the church! Yes, such is its efficacy, that in this dry and barren land, this land where no water is, the waters of God flow; and God’s people have rivers of waters around them to refresh them through it. That a poor wretched creature such as I am should have the Holy Ghost dwelling in me, and be a tree of the Lord’s

planting, is as great a miracle as bringing me to glory. “Greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world.” God has put a wall, an unseen wall of grace, around us; and while Satan is deceiving and blinding the eyes of the world, these waters of God supply the saints, watering the plants of His planting inside the fence of God. What a manifestation of divine power and grace.

O beloved, our souls need to see the church, and the saints individually, thus in God’s vision, with our eyes open, in the Spirit: otherwise we shall not get into the power of God’s thoughts. We do not want “the vision of the Almighty” in order to see that a saint is a saint; neither do we want “open “eyes to discover inconsistencies in the walk of our brethren. We want to rise up and have our eyes open to see, as God sees, this beauty and glory of the church. God is in possession of us. And remember this was said in the very presence of Balak. It is blessed we should have the certainty of these things in the midst of Satan’s power.

What does David say? (Psalm 33). “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” The enemies can only look on, and see how blessed I am whilst I feast on what God has provided. “Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.” Not only have I got mercy and peace, but I have understood its fulness—an overrunning cup. He can both dwell upon the proved faithfulness of God, and count upon it for the future also; as he goes on to say, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,” and finishes with “I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

One thing more. Balaam sees the beauty of the people in “the vision of the Almighty”; but not only so, he sees

their hope in the One that is to be in the midst of them in the latter days. There is the actual beauty of God's people; there are the secret unfailing springs whereby they are refreshed; the power of God is for them against their enemies. But we must see the future also: "And now [he says to Balak], behold, I go unto my people; come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days… I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab," etc.

So as to the church; it will be brought into glory and blessing with Christ. We do not merely see the beauty of the church, according to God's mind, its present loveliness and preciousness in His sight, but we see Him who is to be in the midst of the church, the Bridegroom of the church, whom we are longing for. "We shall see him as he is," 1 John 3:2. By faith we see Him now—we see One our souls long for— who has loved the church and given Himself for it:20 and when He thus comes out in His glory and beauty, we shall be with Him. The same Holy Ghost, who forms us for His eyes, gives Him to our eyes to be the centre of our affections and joy.

There is our hope: We shall see Him as He is. If we have the Spirit shewing us the beauty of Christ now, we are looking for the fulness of glory and beauty in the day of the glory. Let us see that our affections are going out towards Himself.

"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" We have the strength of God's love to think of for present comfort, and where there is a right view of

the beauty and comeliness of the church, and yet of her failure, there will be great humbleness and tenderness of spirit towards the Lord, and towards one another.

The Lord grant we may not sit down content in wretched coldness of heart, with evil in ourselves, or in our brethren. The waters of God are at the root of the plant, however miserable the pruning. How precious this! May we rise up, in the sense of the beauty we have in God's mind, to delight ourselves in Him, who is our comeliness, to glory in Him who is God's delight, and our joy and glory. Amen.

16 The sovereignty and efficacy of the calling of God.

17 "As he is, so are we in this world," 1 John 4:18.

18 Numbers 23:22; 24:8.

19 Observe, the Spirit of God did not come upon him before; God met him, and put a word in his mouth (chapter 23:4-16), but not the Spirit upon him.

20 We look out for Him not merely as the Star of Jacob. The Star is known to us in a more blessed way.

A Christian—Who And What Is He Now And Hereafter?

It is rather a solemn thing to say what a Christian is, especially when we think of what it is that made him one. God is acting so as to glorify Himself. It is a solemn thing to be a revelation of that of which Christ is worthy —of the result of Christ's work; as it is said, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied," Isaiah 53:11. It does us good to think of this, because it makes us judge ourselves, to see how far we are really that. Not that we ever shall be the perfect display of it until we are "like him" (1 John 3:2), until we see Him as He is, and are conformed unto His image in glory. Still, if we bear Christ's name, we should seek to present a fitting result of His work in the world.

That is what a Christian is. Hence it becomes a solemn thing to say what he is. Still, whilst it is a solemn question, it is a matter of grace. There is such a comfort in this thought! Whilst most solemn, it is always happy, because it is of grace— the free, full, and sovereign grace of God. This all helps us a little.

With regard to the question itself, there is a great difference between what a Christian is "now," and what he will be "hereafter." Not as regards the spring of life, redemption, etc., but now a Christian is the expression of the power of God in the midst of evil; hereafter he will be the expression of the result of that power which has put away the evil, when all the evil is put away.

Take us at our best estate now—a Christian is the expression of the power of God in the midst of the

prevalence of evil. A Christian will not be that exactly hereafter; he will then be the expression of the result of God's power, in the highest sense, when the evil is put away. As to the foundation in Christ's blood, and the power of His resurrection, and the love of God, this as much belongs to his state hereafter as it is the basis of what he is now. God's love in Christ will be the spring of my joy then as it is now.

One thing that gives such settledness of peace (as it regards his own soul's peace) to the Chrstian is, that it does not depend upon what he is now, or will be then, but upon that which is common to both states. The ground of it is the same now that it will be in heaven. The thing displayed may differ; but the ground of confidence is the same now as hereafter. As to the source and spring of it in the love of God, His love is as true, and as perfect, and as complete, and as much manifested towards me now, as it will be when I am in glory; He cannot in His divine love go beyond the gift of His Son. The life also that I have now is not a different life from that I shall have then. No doubt the body hinders it. Its manifestation will be different; but the life is the same.

And the ground of peace changes not. That upon which I rest for eternity is just as much now as it will be then. The blood of Christ has been shed and has been carried into the holiest; Heb. 9, 10. Whatever our conflicts, our conflicts (properly speaking) spring from that ground being entirely settled. Whoever is in conflict as to that has not got to God, or otherwise has not understood the ground of his standing. Unsettlement of soul may arise from a man's not having seen the gospel simply; but as to the ground of his standing, it is just as much accepted

now as it will be then. There is not another Christ to die —no fresh blood to be shed. Nor is there another revelation to be made. There is not a love to spring up in the heart of God that has not been told out. There may be a fuller apprehension of that which has been accomplished, but there is nothing new either to be accomplished or revealed.

Whoever has not got upon that ground (has not had that question settled in his soul) has not got as yet upon simple Christian ground. God may be working in his soul; but I do not call having life the getting upon simple Christian ground. There may be life without the knowledge of what God is as for us, of the perfectness of His love towards us, and of what He has done for us in Christ. Life may make me anxious, and hope, and have desires after God, and long to be assured of His favour, and the like; but, when we speak of a "Christian," we speak of what a Christian is in Scripture, and Scripture always speaks of him—of a believer in any state— as to his standing. It is very necessary to see this.

We must not confound the exercises of a Christian with the standing of a Christian. The ground of his standing is God's work. In his exercises there comes in himself; his flesh, his ignorance, and many other things alas! may be working. But it is entirely according to God's thoughts, and not according to my thoughts, that my standing is to be judged of. Moreover the exercises of my own soul are never the same as God's judgment about them.

When I am thinking of these, it is my actual state that occupies me; but were God to take notice of my actual state, He must condemn me. What He has regard to is the work of Christ for me, and my union with Him, not in

this respect my actual state at all. It is always important to recollect that, because my own judgment of myself ought to be as to my actual state.

Whatever his exercises, however these may vary, the Christian, in one sense, is just the same, because he is in God's sight as Christ. Christ being the perfectly accepted man at God's right hand, the Christian is looked at by God in the same position (Eph. 2:6), sitting in heavenly places "in Christ." In that sense there cannot be any difference; and the ground of our acceptance cannot ever be imperfect. I repeat, we must not confound the movements of life with the ground of our acceptance. We can never have this too simple and clear. It does not make one despise the first actings of life, its first movings and breathings, however feeble and imperfect: I do not despise my child because he is not a man.

In the Ephesians (where what a Christian is is fully brought out), men are viewed as the "children of wrath" in their very nature (necessarily heirs of wrath, because God is what He is, and man is what he is.) Every other distinction is lost sight of, because, in his character of a sinner, man is brought fully into the light of God. But having thus told us what man is, the apostle does not stop with man; he turns round and begins at the other end; he now tells us what God is, that He is "rich in mercy," and (as the effect of this) that He has set us in heavenly places in Christ.

But when we come a little more to detail, I would recall the distinction which I made at first—that a Christian is now the expression of the power of divine life and the divine presence (divine life, I mean, aided by the power

of God), in the midst of evil that he knows; but hereafter he will be the blessed expression of the result of God's power when evil is put away. So with Christ (there was no evil of course in Him; yet, speaking abstractly, it was the same thing; in Him it was perfect) when here; He was what He was in the midst of evil. There cannot be any increase in it in itself; but the manifestation of divine power in us is capable of an indefinite increase.

Redemption, however, precedes everything else (I do not mean by this that it precedes the counsels of God). First, 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 is should be holy and without blemish," Eph. 5:25-27. Redemption precedes the washing. Washing may go on, but it comes after redemption. He makes her His, before He sets about making her what He would have her to be. There may not be a clear thought as to it; but the thing is done nevertheless. Redemption being accomplished, the Lord sets about producing in us the effects and fruits of His grace in conformity to Himself.

The first effect of divine life in the midst of evil is not merely to see, but to have the conscience exercised about, certain things. The moment life begins to work, we get the consciousness of evil inside, as well as of evil outside; that is, it gives the judgment of evil in ourselves. Not that the instant Christ is presented to the soul in grace, the soul sees the evil plainly; it may see the grace and blessing, knowing evil in a general way, without being exercised about it through any definite application of what Christ is to the man within; there

may be rather the loveliness of Christ attracting than any deep work in the conscience. I can quite understand that. But then, before we get into a properly Christian state (the process may be longer or shorter), the necessary effect of life working is to give us the judgment of what man is, in the main bearing of his present condition, as looked at by the Holy Ghost. It brings in the consciousness of what we are in the presence of what Christ is. Then we get the man brought down into the distinct consciousness that it is all over with him. And it is all over with him. I mean by this, not merely that he has sinned and there is condemnation, but that he has no right or title or claim to anything now that he has, either to the promises of God or to anything else. Now that is the place the soul has to be brought to (so hard to come to), to find out what it is in God's presence. He may hope to get out of the scrape if he thinks he has any right to the promises, because these may help him; but it is no use talking of God's promises when God is talking of what I am and of judgment. If I am thinking about what I may be some time or other, promises have their place, they come in most beautifully; but if it is what I am, promises do not touch that. The Syro-phoenician woman (Matt. 15) will serve as an illustration. No promise could meet her condition; for as a Gentile she had not any claim to the promises. The Lord says, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." If you come to me as an Israelite, I may do something for you; otherwise "it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto dogs." But when she replies, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table," she in effect says, God is rich in mercy; and Christ

cannot say He is not—that there is nothing in God for a poor sinner.

I do not believe that a person gets upon right Christian ground (one has to make allowance for ignorance, but there is no true, no solid ground, as to simple and abiding peace), until the soul has been brought to the consciousness that it has no claim whatever or title to promise.

Having been brought down to this by what goes on within, there may be attraction; but the first full effect is that the man is judged, he sees what he is, and becomes entirely hopeless as to what he is, and is turned over entirely to the thought of what God is. We have only to say, “What hath God wrought!” I am now upon new ground, namely, upon that of what God is towards a sinner who is altogether vile. If the sinner is perfectly vile, God is perfectly good. Further, I come to see what He has done because He is so. It is not that He has taken him out of the world. “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world,” etc. He will do that by-and-by.

The first thing in this new life, inasmuch as it is all in Christ, is, that He is raised from the dead. We have to look at what God has done in Christ. I find Christ dead because of sins (our sins); and then I find the quickening life-giving power of God coming in and raising Him from the dead. I should separate this entirely from the heavenly standing of the saints. We have all been too much accustomed to confound these two things, resurrection-life, and heavenly standing. What I see as the effect of resurrection-life is this:—a man quickened and raised with Christ becomes a pilgrim down here.

This is not the whole of a Christian. But it is the power of divine life in the new creature moving in a world that does not belong to him, and to which he does not belong. The Christian begotten by the resurrection of Christ is a distinct thing to consider from a Christian sitting in the heavenly places in Christ. Though the same individual is both, they are distinct things to consider.

In 1 Peter 1 we read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath [not, “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” as in the Ephesians; but] begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time,” v. 3-5. I find here persons begotten unto a lively hope, and what is their hope? are they sitting in heaven? No, they are hoping for it. Therefore the apostle says (chap. 2:11), “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” It is the Christian on his pilgrimage that is contemplated. He is a stranger here. He has an inheritance in heaven; when he is in his inheritance, he will be no stranger; but he is not there, he is going towards heaven. He is a resurrection-man on earth, walking through the world with new affections and feelings, going on towards his inheritance, but he is not there; an Israelite in the wilderness, redeemed from Egypt, and a stranger, but not in Canaan. And there comes in the trial of faith. The apostle goes on to say, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold

temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Where do I find the Christian in Ephesians? Not going a journey at all; he is sitting down; and where? "In heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That is what I am doing now; I am sitting in heaven, settled there. And, Christ being Heir of "all things," the inheritance is not heaven. The inheritance of Ephesians is different from that in Peter; it is all that Christ possesses, and therefore earth comes in. The inheritance of "all things" is the heavenly man's hope; but heaven is his home, his position. In Peter heaven is his hope: he is going towards heaven as his home, and towards his inheritance which is in heaven. There I get a very different condition.

Both these things are true of the same person—both are true of the Christian. It is good to have the trial of faith, it supposes faith to be there; it is good to sit down with Christ where no trial is, and it is good to come down into trial. But these are different conditions. The place of Christ on the mount, when with Moses and Elias (Luke 9), was different in the midst of the excellent glory from that in which He stood when He came down from the mount, and had to meet the crowd, and then cast out the devil. My true position as a heavenly man is to sit in heavenly places in Christ; but on the other hand, as begotten to a new hope by the resurrection of Christ, it is simply going through the world, but it is through the world that I am going. Here I am, a new creature, quickened and raised up with Christ; and what a world am I in! So with regard to Christ's coming; if walking on earth, I am waiting for Christ, the hope of the coming of

Christ, and His appearing to set things right here; but if sitting in heaven, I am there in Christ, and wait to be there with Christ actually, and there enjoy Christ fully. The Lord's coming is not spoken of in the Ephesians; the saints are viewed as sitting in heaven.

I get these two elements of a Christian's position; and in one sense I do not call one more important than the other. I may look at the Christian at the springhead of peace, in full enjoyment of heavenly places, arid in settled peace with God, and fighting for Him in conflict with Satan. But I cannot have him fighting for God in Canaan till I get him into Canaan; I may have him in Egypt under the enemy's power, but that is not conflict with him. It needs redemption by God. But this places him in the wilderness, a second element of his Christian life.

A person acting under the consciousness, and in terror, of Satan's power, fearing he may be lost if left there, is sometimes more in earnest than when he has got peace; but I do not trust this energy. He has not learned what the flesh is, though he may have learned what Satan's tyranny is. It is when he has to say to God that he will find out what the flesh is. A man will always go fast enough if he finds Satan behind him. The Israelites travelled faster when Pharaoh was at their back, than they did afterwards in their stages in the wilderness. There was no murmuring because of the way when Pharaoh was behind them; but then it was afterwards in the wilderness that they were put to the test. Then came the question, Is Christ sufficient, or is the manna "light food"? If a man is not spiritual, he must get something to satisfy his craving. All this is put to the test; put to the

test, not when a man is flying from Pharaoh, but when he is walking with God.

And there comes in the mediation of Christ. In this wilderness state I get Christ between me and God— “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”; but this is not union with Christ: I am looked at in myself; we get individualised. A man may be floundering about, through not having his eye simply fixed on Christ, not knowing how to get to the end; but he finds a thread let down from heaven to bring him to the place exactly where he ought to be, while he is only thinking of the mud, or judging himself for not having valued Christ enough. There are a thousand thoughts and feelings and affections brought out, and into play, as the result of our having resurrection-life. We get the constant loving care and tenderness of Christ brought home to the soul; and there is a necessary character of intercourse with Christ which heaven itself will not give.

This is one part of a Christian. He is a pilgrim and a stranger in the power of resurrection-life, with the mediation of Christ carried on, not to procure for him life, but to maintain his intercourse and communion with God in the light on the footing of what Christ is there. On the footing of that, himself imperfect, he is maintained in intercourse with a perfect God. Everything that the heart of man can be exercised about is met by the fulness of God through the mediation of Him who is both God and man.

The other thing is this (where there is no question or trial at all), the Christian sitting in heavenly places. And there, let me say, it is not yet the church, though in

touching on it we touch the church's position. As resurrection-life did not take a man into heaven, so taking him into heaven does not in itself put him into the church. That is, it may be viewed as an individual thing. When I get into heaven, I am getting wonderfully close to the truth of the union of the church with Christ; still I may look at myself as a single individual in heaven, without at all taking in the unity of the body which is the church.21 I can speak of the "children of God," and of "joint-heirs," without bringing in the idea of the body. I take the Christian sitting in heavenly places. As an individual Christian I have done with conflicts when I get there; it is no longer the journey in exercise of heart. I shall still have conflicts with Satan, but these are for God. I may too have daily to judge my flesh in these conflicts; but judging the flesh is not conflict for God; it is a different thing to have conflict for God, and to be judging the flesh as hindering. When in heaven I am in the result of God's work.

In the Book of Joshua, before a single conflict, there was a table spread, and they had done with the manna. God had spread a table for them in the presence of their enemies (chap. 5). When they got across the Jordan, they sat down and ate the "old corn of the land." The manna (the provision for the wilderness) had ceased, and they were eating the "old corn of the land"; they had Christ looked at as indigenous to heaven. It is not for my wants that I have Christ in heaven; I have no wants there, I have Him there to enjoy Him, to sit down at God's table and feed with everlasting delight upon what God delights in. It is the "old corn of the land" that I sit down to there. And mark the difference as regards the passover. They did not eat it with the blood upon the

doorposts, as in Egypt; they were there enjoying the results of redemption in the consciousness of the quiet security of the land. The aspect of the blood in Egypt was that of keeping God away as a judge. They were sitting down too in the plains of Jericho, in the presence of that great city, the type of all the power of the enemy; and there they ate the “old corn of the land “(Jericho’s land in a certain sense), before one bit of conflict began. So with the Christian.

And here comes in the connection between our sitting in heavenly places and our passage through the world. I should be manifesting distinctly what is heavenly here, and thus be practically a heavenly man, in the midst of worldly men. I should be a heavenly man, as one that is there and at home there, shewing out what I have learned and enjoyed there. Christ was, while walking and acting on earth, “the Son of man which is in heaven.” He manifested towards the world the blessedness of the spirit and tone and character of heaven. He could not be Messiah for the Jews without being the Son of God for men.

If a Christian man is not walking in the Spirit, if the flesh is not subdued, he cannot display to the world the temper and spirit and character of heaven—he is manifesting something else. But the conflicts of the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12) are not merely conflicts in the subduing of our flesh; they are conflicts carried on in realising and laying hold of the things in Canaan that belong to ourselves and others. If Joshua and the Israelites took cities in Canaan, it was because they were in Canaan. Our enemies are there, and there it is we should meet them. There are things in which we have to be faithful on earth; but there are also things

that belong to us because we are sitting together in heavenly places in Christ. A man may be consistent in the one, without displaying the heavenly man. You may see some tolerably consistent on earth, whose souls are not seeking to realise what is theirs in Christ: Satan's effort is ever to hinder our doing that. We cannot carry the flesh into the heavenly conflict. If my flesh is not mortified, I cannot wield the weapons of that warfare. The flesh always brings in Satan's power, who has got a title against it; "and God can never act with the flesh, or display His power for us against our enemies, where it is allowed. If we were walking as born of God, and as having on the whole armour of God, the flesh being habitually mortified, he could have no effect; we should be able to go on in the simplicity of our own service, and he could not come in with his wiles, as in the case of Achan (Josh. 7), and of the Gibeonites (Josh. 9). The moment we get upon heavenly ground, as soon as ever Joshua is in Canaan, I see the Lord's sword drawn, and the question is, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" So with us, there is the drawn sword. The moment we get into heavenly places, the Canaanites are against us. The church of God should be seeking to realise by faith whilst down here all that belongs to it as sitting there in Christ. As soon as Joshua crossed the Jordan, it was Canaan; but Canaan and conflict. All this has the character of the power of God brought in where evil is.

As Christians we have to be pilgrims in consistency with our condition in the wilderness. The Lord may give us palm-trees and wells of water (Exodus 15:27); the ark may go before us to search out a resting place (Num. 10:33); but if we are not prepared to go with the cloud whenever it moves, we are not pilgrims and strangers,

and we in heart go back to Egypt. But the heavenly man, besides his being a man with resurrection-life and the pilgrim of faith, is to be the manifestation down here in the world of that which is heavenly. It may be in the power of hope, but the thing which he presents is that which is his now. He shews plainly and distinctly that he is Canaan, and acts upon the ground of being there. If the land was not as yet cleared of its inhabitants, whose abominations defiled it, still Joshua knew what was suited to it; and therefore, when he had taken the kings and hanged them, he did not leave them there after the sun went down; Josh. 10. He could not allow God's land to be defiled.

As to what the Christian is "hereafter," it may be said he is a risen man still, a heavenly man still. Hereafter, as an individual, he will be the perfect result of the power of God, not in the midst of evil, but of the power of God that has put aside the evil. "There shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads," Rev. 22:3, 4. It is not another man, but the same man, in the perfect enjoyment of blessedness in the midst of good. There are many points of view in which who and what a Christian is now and hereafter might be taken up. The question is far from being exhausted.

One branch of the subject, not touched upon as yet, divides itself into two parts—heirship, and reigning with Christ. A christian is an heir, as well as a child, an "heir of God" and a "joint-heir with Christ," Rom. 8:17. Again, he will reign with Christ; and it may be of use to see what the part in our life here is corresponding to that of reigning. The inheritance is connected with our being

children, “if children, then heirs,” etc. The moment a person is in the position of a child, there is an heir. The reigning part we find connected with suffering: “If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” Both these things are no doubt spoken of the Christian; still this is the principle, “if we suffer with him,” etc.

Again, there is another character which this statement suggests to the mind, and that is his priestly character. I only refer to this now. We are kings and priests unto God. In taking up this it would be interesting for us to see the present intercessional character of priesthood; for in reigning by and by it will be as a royal priesthood, rather than intercessional.

21 The difficulty of separating these two things in the mind is this: the moment I talk about “sitting in heavenly places” I must bring in Christ, because it is “in Christ” that I am there; and thus, also, the whole church is sitting in heavenly places in Him.

The Church—What Is It?

Her Power, Hopes, Calling, Present Position, And Occupation It is a solemn thing when we come to think what the church really is.22 It is all blessed when we think of her privileges; but looking at her as Christ's representative on earth is most solemn—an "epistle of Christ." As the tables of stone represented what God demanded of man, so should the church, and in an equal sense, be in the world the revelation of what God is to man, an exhibition of God's grace and power to man and in man.

When I speak of the "kingdom," it is a different thing.23 We there get the display of power and government, not union and fellowship. Even the testimony of the kingdom comes necessarily to be quite a distinct thing. I should distinguish altogether "the gospel of the kingdom" and "the kingdom," from what we are accustomed to call, "the gospel"24 and "the church." Paul taught the kingdom, and he taught the gospel, and he taught the church; but he never taught them as the same thing.25 There is one revelation: God is going to take to Himself His great power, and to reign. There is another truth: there is to be a bride, and body, of the King. Again, certain things setting out the grace of God are necessary for the soul to be saved. These three things26 are very plainly quite distinct.

From the moment Israel was called as a people, God had evidently the thought of having a king.27 Man's way of setting about it was quite wrong. Up to the time of Samuel priesthood was morally the regular point of association between the people and God. But the priests

were unfaithful, and then the Lord wrote Ichabod upon all that had been Israel's glory. The link between God and the people was broken. The ark was taken by the Philistines. The priests were slain. He delivered His strength into captivity, and the Philistines were in the mount of God.

This was the sign given to Saul;28 1 Sam. 10. He found people going up to Bethel (v. 3). There were people that had faith in the God of Bethel29 (that is, that God would never leave His unchangeable promise to Jacob). Everything else might be gone; but God's connection with Israel could not be broken up. This became the resting-place of faith. God could not fail. Secondly, he was to go to the mount of God (v. 5); and there was the garrison of the Philistines; the power of the enemies of the Lord in the place where God's altar ought to have been, and thus power against those who were acting in faith. Still Bethel could be visited with a tabret and pipe; faith could take up the joy that was proper for the people who had Jehovah for their God. There was also the spirit of prophecy given to him (v. 6). But neither of the signs did Saul understand, though clear and instructive to the eye of faith. David was the opposite of this, and was the type of Christ, as King.

After the king is brought in, there is a change in the position of the priesthood; it ceases to be the habitual link of connection between the people and God. When Eli is set aside (i Sam. 2:35) God says, "I will raise me up a faithful priest … and he shall walk," not before me, but "before mine anointed for ever." There I get a royal person, another link between God and the people, set up above priesthood.30 So that Solomon was quite right in thrusting out Abiathar; 1 Kings 2:27. When Solomon

dedicated the temple, and the priests could not stand to minister because the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God, the king praised God and blessed the people.31 At length the King was presented in humiliation in the Person of Christ. John Baptist comes (Matt. 3) and says, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand … he that cometh after me is mightier than I … whose fan is in his hand … he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”32 John is rejected; and then, after he is cast into prison, Christ takes up the same testimony (Matt. 4). “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness,” etc. The power of God was with Him in testimony, and was seen. The disciples, the King having been rejected, are given to know “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” which to the multitude are parables; chap. 13. And they have God with them. The apostles were to go on (and they went on) preaching the kingdom.

The kingdom is still to be set up, that is, the power of heaven, in the Person of Jesus Christ. He shall take to Him His great power and reign. It will be set up in heaven, for He must go to a far country to receive a kingdom and to return; Luke 19:11, 12. He has gone up on high; but He has not yet been sent back in the power of the kingdom. It will be a “world to come,” not merely a state of Judaism, the kingdom of the “Son of man” — not merely the Jews and their Messiah; Dan. 2, 7. Heaven will be in the highest sense the seat of the kingdom. But it is still the kingdom.

There is another revelation. We are to reign in the kingdom. There are “joint-heirs”; those who are to “reign with him”; and those who are to “sit on thrones.” Yet it is still the kingdom, largely extended, a wider sphere; but I am still travelling in the circuit of the kingdom.

The destruction of Jerusalem was the setting aside of Jerusalem in judicial power; but still we can preach the kingdom of God. There will be the effect of the actual employment of power in setting things to right. At present it is rather in testimony than in power. The effect of the power of Christ in “the world to come” will be to set aside the power of Satan.33 In all this we have only the kingdom. Again, there will be a special testimony to the coming of the kingdom before the close.

There is another ministry that goes out altogether on another principle. In Paul’s ministry I get that which is beyond the reach of dispensations; I have here what man is (not merely “sinners of the Gentiles,” or Jews). He may prove it as regards the Gentiles in one way, and demonstrate it as regards the Jews in another; but what he proves and demonstrates is this, that man as man is at enmity with God. If we begin at Jerusalem, we begin with a testimony to Jerusalem.34 In Paul’s ministry Jews and Gentiles alike are known only as “children of wrath.” We get him preaching the gospel35 to “every creature under heaven.”36 But Paul was not simply a minister of the gospel; he was a minister also of the church “to fulfil [complete]37 the word of God.”

We read in Colossians i:12, “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the

inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom38 of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:39 for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead:40 that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased [the Father] that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. And you,41 that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight." And now as to the ministry: "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; who 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," etc. In the testimony about the church, I find (not the kingdom, nor the salvation of individuals, merely; but) that there is a body for Him

who is the Head, associated and connected with Him in His headship over all things. There is a certain special thing which the Lord has reconciled. Paul deduces everything, as to the church, from Christ's headship of the body, and the flowing down from Him of all he has to minister. How is the accomplishment of this? "By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body," 1 Cor. 12:13.

Turn to Ephesians 1:19: "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." In this passage, there is the headship of the body, and He is "Head over all things to the church."

As to the way and power of the unity of the body of saints formed on earth with Christ, the Head, in heaven, it is by the Holy Ghost "sent down from heaven"42 making them one body.

As a consequence, when Paul speaks of apostles and prophets, he looks at them exclusively in this light,43 and never as appointed by Christ on earth. He says, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other

ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit," etc.44 (Eph. 3:2-5). As to the very existence of these holy apostles and prophets: "Wherefore, he said, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave45 some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," etc. (chap. 4). His thought about apostles is of something that flows from the exalted Head. He knows no man after the flesh.

By one Spirit baptised into one body, we have the Head and the body united together—the Head at the right hand of God in heaven, united to the members, formed into a body down here on earth by the power of the Holy Ghost. Scripture calls that "the church."46 There is a word in Matthew 16 that is sometimes overlooked. The Lord says there to Peter, "Upon this rock will I build my church." There had been the revelation by the Father to Peter of the Person of Christ as "the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him (on the confession of this), "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee… And I also47 say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I 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," etc. Christ is going to build His church; and besides this He gives the keys to Peter, the

keys of the kingdom—a distinct thing from Christ's building His church. The church is that body which the Holy Ghost forms into unity, as connected with, and united to, the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven; and that which the Holy Ghost so unites to Him is the only thing48 in Scripture, called "the church" —that is specifically such.

It may be added that this is a question which at the present moment is running through almost every country in Europe.49 There are endless theories about it; but this is the question, "What is the church?" Some say it is "visible," others "invisible"; some, that there will be a church by-and-by, but there is none now; that there is no church on earth (there may be churches), but (when all are assembled in heaven) there will be a church. Now whilst it is perfectly clear that, when Christ leaves the Father's throne to take the church unto Himself, it will form a glorious body in heaven; yet, plainly, whilst sitting at the right hand of God, the only thing He owns as the church is the body down here. Until He rises up from His seat on high, He is working and ordering and acting always (while hid in God) by the Holy Ghost; and the Holy Ghost is down here. That which He owns as the church is where the Holy Ghost is, until it is united to Himself in glory.

There is no difficulty if we turn to Scripture. Where did Paul look at the church? "By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body," where? On earth, not in heaven. Certainly, gifts of healing, etc., were not in heaven. Nor are the "joints and bands" in heaven. None of its ministries are in heaven. It will be in heaven eventually no doubt, but it is now on earth. This" is a great point to get our souls simple and clear upon.

As to her “power.” In Scripture it is not the power of the church, but the power that works in us—the power of God working in the church: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,50 unto him be glory in the church,” etc. The operation of the power of the Lord is necessarily limited by the moral condition of the church (He may bear with it, have patience towards it, but); God will never publicly act so as to sanction what He disapproves.51 And with regard to power in public testimony; whilst the church was no doubt the vessel of it (there was a certain measure of power in the testimony of the kingdom52 then, for which you would look in vain now), still it was the power of the Son of man. Where it is merely the saving of a soul, or the ministry of the church, one does not look for the same sort of power. God is sovereign and works as He pleases. The church was a vessel of power, and miracles were a testimony to the power of Christ as the risen Son of man. But when I think of the saving of souls, I look rather for that operation of the Spirit of God through the gospel. And when I look at the church, I look to the Head to supply what its need demands. While the church carried externally the character of Christ before the world, she was chartered with power—the power of Christ. That which Christ is to supply can never fail. Christ, and His power, and His acting in power, can never fail. He must nourish the church withal according to its need. But if God is acting in, and towards, persons, there must be truth in His actings; He cannot act in the power of grace contrary to the moral condition of the church, any more than He can act towards an individual contrary to his state before Himself.

We must get our souls down into the consciousness of where we are, before we get the blessing suited to our condition. Where are we? is the question. He never alters His mind. But the church's responsibility never alters His grace. Christ is exactly what it wants now—otherwise my faith cannot get on—as exactly what we want for the church now, as when in the days of the apostles it was adorned with every kind of miracle. But He will not act in the same way. Christ will never give up His thoughts about the church; and if we are acting on our thoughts, and He acts on His, He will make sad work with what we have set up. "He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." If Christ begins to gather, He will scatter that which is not gathered in the power of unity with Himself. As with a card-house, the first wind of God's Spirit blows it all about. This may be very astonishing, very humbling, still it does not discourage (far from it!) those that look for God's actings. You are sure to get bad roads, when the spring comes, and the frost breaks up. Let the church be what it may, that is, the members of it; Christ is not altered. Her power is her weakness, her spirit of dependence, in never getting out of the place of constant, simple, unmingled dependence.

The "hope" of the church, as such, is identified with, and founded on, the relationship in which it is placed as united to the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. It is true she is here as a pilgrim on earth, but, at the same time, she is the bride on earth. United to her Head in heaven, seated in heaven in Him, she waits to be there. The one proper hope of the church has no more to do with the world than Christ has, who is in heaven. She will see things set right in the kingdom, but this is not her hope:

her hope, as her actual association, is with the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, where she knows Him. Where did Paul know Christ? In the heavenly glory. And Paul knew the church to be one with Christ there.

There may be the change of the body in order to the accomplishment of the glory, but there is nothing as to its own position but sitting in heavenly places with Christ, because it is now sitting in heavenly places in Christ. To be along with Christ is our one hope— “That where I am, there ye may be also.” In the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle says, “Then shall we ever be with the Lord”; and what follows? Nothing! A great many things may be happening: but the church’s hope is to be with Him where He is, and like Him, when she sees Him as He is.

As to the “calling.” The heavenly calling, though embraced, does not at all fill up the thought. It does not in itself convey the thought of the church.53 We might, as a set of individuals, be called up, and look to be caught up into heaven, and have a heavenly portion as the brethren of Christ, without knowing that we were the body and bride of Christ. The “hope” of the church is its marriage with the Bridegroom, and that is in heaven; we may come forth from heaven, for the kingdom and the glory, but our place is in heaven, in the unity with Christ as one with Him. We are builded together for the habitation of God through the Spirit; that is the calling of the church down here.54 As to “present position and occupation,” there is one thing makes a great difference. When the Spirit of God was working in the beginning of the gospel, the testimony had the aspect of power, and produced a sensible and visible result; there was an ostensible gathering. The central energy had the fulness

of the truth, though there might be feebleness at the extremity of the rays. But there is nothing of this sort now. The sheep of God are scattered. The camp has got wrong. The consequence of this is all manner of degrees of knowledge. The very principle of unity has a separative tendency. A man must now settle himself upon the centre of truth. If my soul is not prepared to look to Christ, and to gather with Christ, and to take His judgment, I shall be cast into the uncertain condition of the differing judgment of every saint I meet with in the day's walk. Where Christ is the common object, there will be a coalescing power. I find the church of God in a unity which attaches itself to Christ alone, as the one sole centre.

The "occupation" of the church ought to be constant, incessant reference to its Head. If its Head is not its first thought (and that is shewn in thinking of its Head, and filling itself into all the thoughts and mind and affections of its Head), it cannot act for Him. This is its grand occupation. "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." I must get through the crowd of Satan's power, and I must get beyond the crowd to my Head, who is the only source of power. We should seek that kind of communion with the saints which living in spirit with the Head gives. We should get all who hear to join in the cry; Rev. 22. So should the church have its own light, that all that is outside would be shut out. The apostle was living in a world of his own—he was filled with ideas of his own; but they were God's ideas, and he had power. It is not knowing the scene I have to act in that gives me power (we get no strength from the contemplation of that), but intercourse and living communion with the Head. We

should get near enough to Christ to enjoy Him, and to know Him truly, and to gather up all that is like Him. If not separated by affection from the world, we shall be separated by discipline in the world. He will vex our souls to get us separate, if in spirit and in heart we are not separate. “Because thou servedst not Jehovah thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart … therefor thou shalt serve thine enemies which Jehovah thy God shall send against thee.”

22 Not, ought to be, but, is; she ought to be a faithful representative; but we cannot take the church of God out of this place, let her have got into what condition she may.

23 It is of great importance to distinguish between the kingdom and the church.

24 We employ the term “gospel “in a very limited sense, but in the scriptures it is used in a much more general way. For example, the apostle could say that when Timothy came back from them, he brought good tidings (preached the gospel) of the brethren’s faith and charity. Again, we read “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them,” Heb. 4:3. To them it was the promise of the land. The word is not restricted to the grace now preached, it is simply “good news,” and there may be the good news of the kingdom, or the good news of Canaan.

25 He preached the kingdom of God; but it is a very distinct thing that God should set up a reign of power on the earth (take the word “reign” instead of “kingdom,” and you will see at once that this is quite distinct from the idea of the “church”); that would not necessarily touch the question that Christ was going to have a bride

united to Him in glory. And when he speaks of his ministry, he distinguishes his own ministry into a ministry of the gospel, and a ministry of the church.

26 The kingdom, the church, and the salvation of the soul.

27 This thought was not fully brought out until David; but in the days of Moses it was brought out that He would not only have a kingdom, but a king. Moses is called “king in Jeshurun” (Deut. 33:5), but he was not their king.

28 He ought to have understood it, but he did not.

29 Bethel was the place where Jacob had seen that God was the unchangeable God of Israel (Gen. 28).

30 From this time the people’s fortunes followed the king.

31 As Melchisedek.

32 That is, the King is coming in judgment.

33 Miracles were “miracles of the world to come” (Heb. 2:5; 6:5.)

34 The testimony in Matthew 28:19 goes out without a word about the Jews; Christ had been with the Jews, but the testimony is to go out unto the Gentiles. In Luke 24:47 the “beginning at Jerusalem “marks the greatest possible grace.

35 In the common sense of the word.

36 It was not a different gospel, as to the salvation of the soul from that of Peter; but the testimony was more indiscriminate. I may distinguish in speaking to a man, but I must come to the same point— You are a lost

sinner, and God is a holy God, and (Jew or Gentile), if not washed in the blood of Jesus, you must perish.

37 In order to the completion of the word of God, the doctrine of the church (as taught by him) must be preached, as well as the kingdom.

38 There I get the kingdom.

39 Besides being the image of God, He is Head over creation; and the reason of that is, that He has created it all.

40 It is now “Head of the body, the church,” as “first-born from the dead.”

41 The church. Here (as there was the headship over all things, and the headship of the church, so) we get the reconciliation of all things in purpose, and the present reconciliation through faith, which is the church.

42 Come down after Christ’s ascension, and consequent upon His glorification at the right hand of God, the work of redemption being accomplished.

43 As flowing from Christ, the exalted Head in heaven.

44 Here I get “holy apostles and prophets,” and a thing known nothing of until revealed to these apostles and prophets, to whom it was revealed by the Spirit.

45 From this height.

46 One greatly respects the jealousy of souls having the consciousness of the electing love of God, and His saving every one whom He has called from Adam downward, in being alarmed lest this distinction should affect the foundation of God’s electing love, through the blood; but still it is my duty, as well as my privilege, to understand the position in which God has set me, and to

call by the right name what God has called by that name in scripture.

47 In effect, “I am going to give thee an official place; I am going to say something: My Father has revealed my name to thee, and I am going to give thee an official name!”

48 Local “churches” are not in question here.

49 The thing people are seeking to settle is, What is the church of God? It may be said to be the question of the day with the saints; and most surely it connects itself with every part of practice.

50 “In us,” it is true, but still it is His power.

51 He sanctions the gospel preached, and there will be a certain measure of power go with the gospel.

52 The kingdom was there to a certain extent.

53 We are constantly confounding in our minds the members of the church and the church itself. A great many things are true of the members that do not involve the church distinctively (that is, as gathered into unity by one Spirit, baptised into one body). I may speak about the various members of a corporation without speaking of the corporation, its rights, etc., as such.

54 In Ephesians 4 Paul beseeches “that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called … endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling,” etc.

With regard to the distinction between Peter, Paul, and John, as to the subject of ministry committed to them, Paul develops the dispensation of God; Peter was a

witness of the resurrection of Christ. In Paul, it is not simply resurrection, but union with Christ at the right hand of God; he was converted by hearing Christ (whom he had never seen on earth) telling him that (in persecuting the church) he was persecuting Himself. (Acts 4:4, 5.) That was the converting word. In John we get another thing, an abstract statement of what the nature of God is, and consequently what the nature of the children of God—love and righteousness. God is light, and God is love; and the nature of the children is deduced from the nature of God Himself.

Christ’s Cross, And God’s “Due Time”

Romans 5:6-8

In the last verse of this chapter we have, in fact, the summing up of the great principles and ways of God’s dealings with man in this principle of the gospel, “grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The result of what the apostle has been speaking of as to God’s dealings, dispensational and personal, is, that all is grace. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly,” v. 6. “God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” v. 8. It is grace that did everything; v. 15-21. “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners,” and they may have gone on sinning and setting aside the authority of God; but by Christ’s obedience “shall many be made righteous.” “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” And in the sum of the whole matter grace reigns.

That which gave the apostle so much confidence in this was, that it was consequent upon the discussion of the whole condition of man, as looked at in every way and in every shape. The blessed result was, not something that came in, and the discussion after; but after the discussion of the whole condition of man (that having been gone through), God takes His own place, and manifests what He will be and is towards the sinner in Jesus Christ. Now that is properly speaking the gospel. The gospel is not what man is, or what God requires from man, but what God is after He has thoroughly revealed what man is. When received in simplicity it

leaves no possible question in the mind. It is the revelation of God made after He has estimated all our need. The gospel, we repeat, is the revelation of what God is, when what man is has been thus fully revealed. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Peace of soul is constantly hindered through our not recognising that God has taken full cognizance of what we are. The gospel begins consequent upon His having made a full estimate. He knew from the beginning what man was and would be; but after, in his history, He had brought out and demonstrated in ways and conduct what man was under all the possible circumstances in which he could be placed—when He had demonstrated him to be entirely lost, and that He could not trust him in any way or in any measure, He begins, and says, I cannot trust in you: you must trust in Me. Hence the reason there is often a long and painful conflict, because of our not being brought down, in conscience, to the point where the gospel begins. A man may acknowledge himself to be ungodly, but then he hopes to cease to be ungodly; and God perhaps lets him struggle on thus for some time, until in his own soul he is brought to the place where the gospel begins. It is not that the gospel is not simple, but that in conscience we are not in the conditions where the gospel sees us. The work must be in the conscience. We read (Matt. 13) of a man hearing the word, and anon with joy receiving it, yet of his not having “root in himself”; evidently no work in the

conscience (it is not that he is insincere) but only in the intellect; he has never been brought in guilty before God; “for,” it is added, “when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended.” Whereas, if he knew that his own soul was lost without Christ, surely he would say with the disciples, “Lord, to whom shall be go? thou hast the words of eternal life!” (John 6:69). It is a great deal harder to believe that we are “without strength “than that we are “ungodly.” Many a soul believes the one, that has not as yet been brought to believe the other. God has given us His history of the world from Adam to Christ. There was a “due time “for the death of Christ, a “due time,” that is, in the history of the world. So is there the “due time,”55 of the individual heart; not that the same feelings pass through the minds of all, but each must be brought to the result given us by the history of man previously to the death of Christ.

It is true, many a person admits himself to be ungodly that has not been brought to feel the full meaning of the word. It is wonderful how our moral distance from God has rendered us incapable of judging of this. If a man say that God is holy, and that he is a sinner, as judged of by his natural conscience, yet not admit that he is shut out from the presence of God, but reply, “Oh, I hope not,” he has not the power of apprehending His presence. On the one side God is “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,” on the other man is a sinner; but he has no sort of conscience or consciousness that he is in the presence of God. There is not a single individual that would not put off being there. Our conscience can never naturally bear it; the whole secret of their hopes is, that we have never been in the presence of God. In one sense

we are always in His presence, but I speak now of being brought near in conscience. A man may be living absolutely without God, and yet be accounted a very good man after all. If he hurts his fellow-man it is another affair. In judging of right and wrong in the world God is always shut out. There is no surer proof of the way man has cast off God than his judgment of right and wrong; he calls “wrong” that which injures man, but the divine presence and claims are shut out. It all shew this first great truth, that men are “without God.”

But there is another truth stated here—they are also “without strength.” When a man is really brought to himself, it is always a question of present standing. An ungodly man will think (it is the natural thought) of meeting God some time, of what He will be in the day of judgment. But if His presence be revealed to the heart, it is His presence now that occupies it. Whilst there is merely the thought of going to God, there is another question: man thinks about how he can make up with God—time is before him, in which he can make his peace with God. He is either unconscious of the state he is in, or is looking to something by which he hopes, at a future day, he may be able to stand before God. He has no real thought of God but as a judge. Now hoping for mercy so, is no more than saying (and many mean nothing but this), that God is not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, that He can let a little pass.

As to the first point, the state of the Gentiles was thorough ungodliness; Rom. 1. The apostle, after looking at man in every way (proud as man is of himself), brings all in guilty. But men have a natural conscience, and they are afraid to do in the light what they do in the dark. When in the outward darkness of Satan and

ungodliness, they “work all manner of uncleanness with greediness” (Eph. 4:17-19), worshipping stocks and stones, etc. Christianity makes men ashamed to do in the light what they did before in the dark (the profession of it, I mean; in that sense, it is borrowed light). Being in this condition, his own lusts are his springs of action, the slave of Satan and of his own lusts, gratifying his mere natural wicked inclinations, that was a clear case. It did not become a holy God. It was plainly ungodliness.

But besides this, there was another thing. God singled out a nation, to which He shewed great kindness, and gave (as His people) a rule. And then the question was whether there was strength in man to walk by this rule. He spake the ten commandments with His own voice on mount Sinai, and added, “Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” After all the will of man was that which wrought in his heart, and he was a breaker of this law.

But this went much farther. I may have my mind open to see and estimate the spirituality of the law, and not be merely a carnal Jew: where does that bring me? Into the consciousness, not merely that I have failed, and broken the law without, but of a principle within—a “law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members,” Rom. 7:23. If I am put under a law, the better that law, the worse my case. It may be said, “Why then did God give the law?” “It was added,” we are told, “because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made,” Gal. 3:19. To what end? “The law entered [perfect as it was] that the offence might abound.” What could the law enter for, to man

already a sinner and having this law in his members? “The law entered that the offence might abound, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful,” Rom. 7:13. This was the way God took to convince man that he was “without strength.” And in that sense it was mercy. What is more difficult than to convince man of this? The judgment right and the affections right, still there was this law in his members; and the law, while it discovered and brought out this, imparting no strength, added to the character of the sin. For then was another thing; it made every act which was the result of this evil of our nature “transgression” —a thing done in despite of His authority. “Sin by the commandment became exceeding sinful,” Rom. 7:13. Now clearly a thing that makes sin “exceeding sinful” is not the way to make me a, sinner, have any righteousness before God!

What is man without the law? what with it? Man without the law is out of the presence of God; with it, he has failed in responsibility, and is a breaker of the law. And when Jesus came, the witness of the goodness of God, he rejected Him; John 15:24, 25. Man has been tried in every way, and found utterly wanting. Wherefore? Was God ignorant of his condition? No; law was for the discovery of it to himself. God is now bringing home to his conscience that which He knew from the beginning; Rom. 3:19.

A word here as to the triple form the law took. First, there was the perfect standard of what man ought to be; secondly, the prohibition of what man was disposed to, a positive standard of what God required, and the prohibition of that to which man was inclined; and, as a third thing, an adjunct of certain ordinances and ceremonies “imposed until the time of reformation,”

Heb. 9:9, 10. What did God do all this for? On the one hand, to demonstrate that man was not righteous; and, on the other, to point out One who (holy and righteous) should suffer “the just for the unjust.”

What did man? He took, to make out a righteousness for himself before God, the thing God had sent in to demonstrate him a sinner; and then, in order to fill up the gap in his own heart, sought to eke out his righteousness through these ceremonies—types and prefigurings of Jesus, the substitute for the sinner.

The moment there is spiritual understanding, when grace is not understood, the only effect is to make the soul miserable— it finds no strength. The more it understands the law to be what it should be, the more it feels justly condemned, and incapable of fulfilling it, or of delivering itself from its condition. “O wretched man that I am!” is its cry, and “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). All that is merely the question, “What is man?” Man is ungodly and without strength; and his history is summed up in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well now, have we been brought to the acknowledgment of the result of this history? Had we simplicity to receive by faith what God shews us man to be, we should have no thought of his being under a state of probation. For four thousand years man was under a state of probation, and, as the result of the trial, no good is expected from the bad tree. The gospel is come on the ground of man’s being no longer under probation of God. He has given up looking for fruit. “A sower went forth to sow,” etc. (Matt. 13). The natural thing was for Jesus to seek fruit; but there was none there: all had become verjuice.

Man having been put to the test, now God comes in. It is quite evident that, unless it be for everlasting condemnation, we must give up the thought of appearing before God as a Judge; Rom. 3:19, 20. “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” The more I know of myself, the more I know that. The love of Christ only puts me into a darker judgment of myself. Is God to pass by judgment, as if there were no difference between good and evil? Impossible! There is just the beginning of wisdom. We cannot stand before God: what is to be done? A man must, in that sense, have done with himself. I cannot trust God in anything I ever have been, or can be; God cannot trust in me: now can I trust in God? What God is was before sin. If I begin to reason, I am under law; I cannot reason about God being grace to me: if I could reckon on it, it would not be grace.

Where shall I find the revelation and testimony of what God is? In Christ. What was this blessed witness for God here? Never anything but grace. With the Pharisees He shewed that their righteousness was only the adding of the sin of hypocrisy to their other sins. But whenever a man was before Him without any pretence to righteousness, let him be the vilest of the human race—a thief, an adulteress, a woman of the city, who was a sinner—whatever else, He was grace and nothing but grace. I want to know what the God with whom I have to do, as a sinner, is; and what is He? Grace. Perhaps I say, If I go to Him, I shall find Him gracious; but that is not all the testimony. Jesus came to us. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might Live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God,

but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John 4:9, 10. In the coming of the Son of God, I have the positive certainty of what God is to me, assuming that I believe Him to be the Son of God; I have the perfect certainty of His love. "When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." From His mouth (if I am to take His testimony) I shall never hear anything but "Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." If I am in the truth of my sins, I shall find Christ in the truth of His grace.

God has right to be sovereign, and there is the reign of grace (v. 31). But God is righteous; and therefore grace is to reign "through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." In the grace of God reigning, He has given His Son to be the proof of His love; but then God is righteous, and could not introduce the sinner in his sins into His presence, and therefore He gave His Son to bear the sins. God's righteousness is displayed in all its truth and power. The Lord Jesus died for the ungodly. He was obedient at all costs: He bore everything, and went down into the dust of death, man's hatred, God's desertion, and Satan's power; we find Him there at the cost of everything. Everything that was against us was done away. By one man's obedience many are made righteous.

God's righteous wrath against sin has been exhibited. Where do I learn it? In the cross of Christ. Was it in holily sparing His Son? No! I see the wrath of God against my sin executed in that cross. The judgment of God against sin, the thing I dreaded, is now my salvation: "Out of the eater has come forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness"; the head of Goliath, so to speak, has been taken off with his own sword. The Lord

Jesus Christ has risen again as having borne the judgment. But more, He stands in living righteousness before God. Righteousness is there for ever under the eye of God.

The blood of Christ shed in death—death as the wages of sin—is ever under the eye of God. I do not say that it is ever under my eye, but it is under God's eye. He is the Judge. Never shall we feel about it as we ought; but sure I am He feels about it as He ought. He sees the blood. "When I see the blood, I will pass over." The blood is of infinite value with God. But there is another thing, He Himself is there— "Jesus Christ the righteous." He who has obeyed, who has accomplished all, is there. There may be chastisement from the Father (Heb. 12), and a great deal of painful discipline for our good; but righteousness is ever there, the righteous One in the presence of God for us.

The Holy Ghost was to convince the world of righteousness, because Jesus had gone to the Father; John 16:7, 10. Righteousness is to be found in the presence of God, and it is He who has borne my sins.

And let us remember that this cannot be a question of hope. My soul may be looking to Jesus and hoping that He will speak a word of peace; but I do not hope that Christ will die for me; I do not hope that Christ will rise again for me and accomplish this righteousness; I believe. It is a simple question of the value of the Person, and blood, and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to the Christian life. The first thing is to begin our conduct with God. Do not let us talk about what we shall be. If we come to God with our present in our hand, the first question is, What are you? Man is a sinner, and no

present in the hand of a sinner is accepted. Where there is really truth in the heart, the conscience takes notice of its present condition, and will never dream of putting off. It is, I have seen Thee: what shall I do? Job was a godly man, but a reasoner; yet the moment he sees God, he says, “I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” He sees God, and that ends the whole question.

There is another point. It is not merely the efficacy of the work as regards the past, so that I stand before God without fault, but I am there in Christ. I bless God for many means in helping me on in my walk; but as for my standing with God, were there anything whatever needed, it would be saying, I was not already perfect in Christ. Faith says, Christ has presented me in the presence of God, according to the mind of God, and I have nothing to seek. This is what the apostle means by “holding the Head,” Col. 2:19.

Another thing flows from this: as grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, realising my position by virtue of being united to Him, the life in which I am one with Christ will shew itself down here in my living to Christ. The principle of the Christian’s position is just this:—You have died with Christ, and, to be living as those who are “alive from the dead,” you cannot have a single principle in common with the world. I am one with Christ (if I am a believer), and consequently as Christ before God, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,” Gal. 2:20. So again,

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal body,” 2 Cor. 4:10. It is not the demand of a certain amount of human righteousness, or the removal of certain evils that hurt the conscience and offend society; it is the living display of what Christ is before men. We should never be content when we fail to display Christ before men: as Christ is righteousness for me before God, so is He the example and standard of righteousness before men: as Christ is for me before God, so ought I to be for Christ before men. This is the way for the Christian to judge of right or wrong. We may be humbled because of failure, but we must not lower the standard.

55 It has been said with truth that man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.