The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, Volume 16 (Practical 1)

John Nelson Darby

Public domain. As published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at https://plymouthbrethren.org/series/11542

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

Obedience

Editor's Note1

I have found that one of the points on which the condition of the church of God hangs very much at the present time is, whether obedience precedes blessing, or blessing obedience. Many are, in some degree though perhaps by no means altogether, aware of the extent to which the principle, that blessing must precede obedience where the will of God is ascertained, has gone, or how widely its influence is spreading. It is a strange point of connection between Newman Street and the subsisting systems. The directions (as far as they are apprehended in the minds of those concerned, which is the only way in which we are concerned in them) which have emanated from Mr. Irving, or those speaking with him, have certainly varied; but they have all borne directly upon retaining those subject to them, in the systems current as religion in the world (though these are all asserted by them to be Babylon), and upon the plea that they could take no step until they received the Spirit, such as they possessed in Newman Street. This has frequently been the result of direct instructions in that place to persons who have gone there.

Another principle has been adopted by a large body of the clergy, tending to the same point: that without tradition no step can be taken, because obedience becomes uncertain and therefore dangerous. The result is wonderfully similar, and seems to me to proceed from Satan—such uncertainty and difficulty of mind as leads a person to settle down in what is confessedly wrong, and what he knows to be such. This, inevitably dulling the

conscience, leads to a state of mind grievous to the Spirit of God, and necessarily lowering the moral energies of the parties concerned; “for whosoever hath to him shall be given.” The coalition between Irvingism and high-church principles in this respect has an astonishingly wide influence; and often so, when the persons concerned little suspect the source from which it flows; while it finds ample aliment in the natural feeling of timidity and unbelief, and assumes the justifiable principle of caution, and is never thought for a moment to be the result of man’s disposition to acquiesce in evil, rather than to act in trying circumstances.

In those who decline acting from the want of the power of the Spirit it assumes the form of greater humility than usual, and greater dependence upon the Holy Ghost. On the other side, it appears like great steadiness of character, and an indisposition to acquiesce in the movements unguided by principle, which the easily led human mind is in so many ways making at the present moment. Thus certainly the fairest principles of conduct are brought to bear (though from such opposite, and, but for this, mutually opposed sides) upon those who conscientiously do not acquiesce in the evil in which they find themselves placed. Nothing can be more opposed than the principles which lead to the conclusion on one side and on the other. In result only they agree—to stay where circumstances have placed them; which is just what the selfishness of unbelief will always do.

Now there is one thing only which can justly withstand the power over the mind of such nominally good views as these, so apparently opposed to evil; and that is obedience. There is nothing so humble, nothing so

steady as obedience; nothing which so marks the Spirit's presence, nothing so opposed to insubordination, nothing by which every ungodly voice must be so utterly silenced, as by obedience. I confess, when I see such very opposite principles leading to the same conclusion —principles so diametrically opposite, and in conflict with each other, as resting on the presence of the Spirit, and tradition—I am led to think that the result is not the effect of the principles in either case, but of some entirely different motive; and that the only operation of the principles is to neutralise, in either case, some other principle which acts in moving those who plead them; and consequently, by so neutralising it, to leave them where they were, without respect to the right or wrong of the case; which is precisely the result in the present instance.

And such I believe to be just the fact: but if God have any will in the matter, and this consequently terminates in disobedience, it becomes a very positive evil, most grievous to the Spirit of God, supposed to be, or waited for, and makes tradition (discoverable or undiscoverable) to be such as renders void the word of God. It is reserved for these days, among protestants, to make tradition a necessary supplement to the word of God; and it is a very great mistake to suppose that it was ever used in the early churches in the way now proposed. It was there, whether wisely or unwisely, a positive tradition, and in confirmation of doctrines avowedly taught and declared. A tradition that they had not yet (or did not know to be the security of the church) was an imbecility reserved surely for a state of hopeless decay.

But the assertion that obedience is the great principle to go on—obedience to known truth, not plans of our own mind, but obedience to known truth as the portion of a single-eyed, humble, simple mind; and that this is the way of these additional blessings, which are matters of God's gift (obedience to the order of which is then part, of course, of every spiritual mind) is of very great importance: but, in all cases and under all circumstances, gifts or no gifts, obedience is the path of a Christian—the path of duty and blessing.

I would first shew the essentiality of the principle, its deep essentiality; then, that it is the preliminary of blessing; and lastly, that it is the order of all special gift in Christ, the ground on which it all flows forth. The first establishes the principle; the last applies it.

Obedience is the only rightful state of the creature, or God would cease to be supreme—would cease to be God. God may shew the impotency of the creature by turning all the wilful rebellion it may be guilty of to His own purpose in blessing; and they that are adversaries bound to it in His own power; but the only rightful position of the creature is obedience: upon this hangs all the order of the creation—on this hang sin and righteousness. The definition of sin is lawlessness, doing one's own will. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

Let us see how distinctly this is brought out in Scripture in its broadest lines. The first Adam and the second, the Lord from heaven, the great heads and types of ruin and of blessing, are thus distinguished as the disobedient and the obedient ones. The first Adam did his own will. He was put under a test of obedience. This was the critical point of the first Adam's standing and blessing:—

“Thou shalt not eat.” He did eat, and was ruined: death, the wages of sin, came in, the consequence of man’s act, that not being the will of God. Death was the wages of sin; and sin was disobedience—insubjection to God. Here its character and result were determined—the hinge of man’s fate—the now wide-open door to every evil; but at which indeed mercy entered before man was excluded, that he might bear it with him in the desert into which he was driven, justly driven, without.

Precisely the opposite was found in the blessed and perfect Saviour. Would you know His character, His attitude now that He is ushered in, in His own humble but holy and perfect announcement? “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” This was His constant character, His perfectness, as man. So we read in the course of His life: “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” This character was stamped on every circumstance; “He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” And as in life He did always such things as pleased His Father, for He sought not His own will but the will of Him that sent Him; so there was no limit to its extent any more than to its perfectness: for, loving His own to the end, He became obedient unto death, the death of the cross; for, though willingly doing it, “this commandment have I received of my Father.”

He had now ears dug for Him (Ps. 40:6): the Lord God had opened them, and He was not rebellious, neither turned away back, but “gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair”; nor hid His face from all that obedience brought Him into, power or no power; for He was crucified in weakness, though He

liveth by the power of God. His power was the powerful service of God; His weakness the patience of all His will.

So it was—obedience was the principle on which He acted— in temptation. “It is written “was His reply ever to the tempter’s suggestions; and when the tempter would thereupon have guilefully alleged a promise, “It is written, he shall give,” etc., our Lord met him by the answer, “It is written”: an answer shewing the principle of obedience as contrasted with the principle of assumption, of the assumption even of true privilege—a most important truth! But of this more hereafter. Perhaps I have said more than is needful on this; for the one sentence, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God,” to the believer stamps the character, and fills up the principle, of the life of the holy Jesus. He was the Model of obedience. Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.

The essential contrast to this is in Antichrist: “The king shall do according to his will.” This is his characteristic: not regarding any, “He shall do according to his will and magnify himself.”

Let us now trace other parts of scripture. In Exodus the word of the Lord to Moses is, “Thus shalt thou say, Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself; now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed,” etc. And all the people answered together, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” I speak not here of their competency to fulfil their undertaking, but of the principle of obedience—the only principle on which God could deal with man, or man walk with God.

So, in the blessing of Abraham in Genesis 22, the Lord closes with this— “Because thou hast obeyed my voice.” And Jeremiah takes up the word of the Lord to Israel by Moses (chap. 7:22), “For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.”

Such is the tenor of the covenant on which the existing comforts of the land were held, as detailed in Deuteronomy 28, after they had broken the former. Such is the principle of the restoration-covenants of faith, when they had lost the fruits of the former, as given in Deuteronomy 30; “and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice, according to all that I command thee this day.”

So, in the apostasy of Saul in 1 Samuel 15, we find the same basis of judgment— “Why didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice”; even as we find its principle and its perfection in our Lord’s constant walk. It is the character of the believer’s sanctification— sanctified unto obedience and the blood of sprinkling of Jesus Christ; 1 Pet. 1:2. This is that to which the believer is sanctified; this the purpose, the object, of his sanctification: so, where the contrary state is spoken of in Ephesians 2, “Wherein in times past ye walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”

Nor does anything ever affect this essential principle: nothing but sin can draw a man out of it. The doing our own will is always sin, always the acting of the old man, not subject to God or it would do His will, not its own—the nature which does not bring in God, but acts for itself. The object of obedience may be in question, but self-will is always wrong. Thus Peter, when charged before the high priest's council with disobedience to its behests, does not plead a right to do his own will—a right to do what he pleased; he had no such right. As towards God, it would have been the expression of self-will; he would not have been honouring God therein. His word was not, 'I have a right to do what I like without reference to you'; but, "We ought to obey God rather than men." It would have been really disobedience to have obeyed them. God would have been disobeyed in the result. Peter would have acquiesced, yea, taken a leading part in disobedience, as far as he was concerned.

Thus we find how the principle is preserved in all the trying circumstances of refusing subjection to human authority. It can be swerved from in no instance without breaking through the first and only principle of accepted relationship to God; it is the only exercise, save praise, of life to God.

It appears to me that this principle is greatly lost sight of and abused by all religious parties. As to this, they are divided into two great classes—those who plead obedience, and those who plead liberty. Peter's answer, it seems to me, meets both. The dissenters, as a body, plead liberty—rights—the title to do, as regards men, what they please. The churchmen claim obedience, and plead frequently the principle; but it is still to men, and

not to God. “We ought to obey God” is the Christian’s answer to both. “We ought to obey,” I say to the dissenter, who claims rights: “We ought to obey God,” to the churchman, who pleads the principle of obedience in the defence of all the corruptions which rest merely on the authority of man and his ways: “We ought to obey God rather than man.” How perfect is scripture in setting in order the ways of men, the narrow path which no other power detects, as revealing the principles of the human mind, and judging them! Self-will is never right. Obedience to man is often wrong—disobedience to God.

The next thing I would mark in connection with this is, that the commands of God, though the literal circumstances of blessing associated with them may be gone, never lose their power; for they are always, unless as connected with these blessings in detail, moral in their character, exhibiting and expressive of God, on which relationship to Him is necessarily founded. This is what the word in Deuteronomy 30:12-14, quoted by the apostle, means: “It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us, that we may hear and do it… But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.” Now the apostle calls this the righteousness of faith (Rom. 10:6), the force of which we shall see in a moment, if we examine the place where it occurs in Deuteronomy, and learn also the accuracy of scripture quotation; and that this quotation in Romans, as everything else in Scripture, is the mind of the Spirit of God.

The statement of Moses in Deuteronomy was not the covenant on which, in literal obedience, they held the

land; this would not have been the righteousness of faith, but the principle of Do, and then the blessing. It was besides the covenant that was made with them at Horeb (chap. 29:1), and proceeds upon the ground of the total loss of the literal blessings, which were the result of literal obedience in the land: “And it shall come to pass when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind, among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey,” etc. That is, after the covenant of literal obedience had been so broken that they had lost the fruits of it in the possession of the land, and were driven out (at once the evidence that it was broken, and constituting the impossibility, in that exclusion from the land, of such literal obedience), thereon the Lord says, “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven,” etc. But it was nigh them, that which faith recognised in its power and principles, although, in exclusion from the land, its literal observance was impracticable.

Here the apostle took up the Jews, and planted them on the principle of the obedience or righteousness of faith (to them still “Lo-ammi”); that is, the confession of Messiah, at any time the great hope and comfort of their law to them, but specially while they were thus in bondage and sorrow. No other but a basis of faith could be available to them. This was its strength and surest object; while the obedience of faith for His name was withal spread to the nations also. The obedience of faith, whatever the state of, however apostasy is undermining,

the church, is still, and so much the more, the principle of all righteous individual conversation.

It is not the exactitude of literal observance which is here imposed—that may be impossible. It was so with the Jews when there was the highest exemplification of faithful obedience, as in Daniel for example; neither is the oldness of the letter the character of the Christian dispensation; that is not the obedience of faith. But the obedience of faith, in the newness of the Spirit, is always open, and finds its path according to the spirituality, and therefore spiritual discernment, of the people seeking it; and upon this God rests it. Exact conformity to His mind may be, and surely was, accompanied by direct and immediate witness of blessing, such as we have not now —and could not have, because it would be the recognition of inconsistency, which God could not sanction, whatever be His individual prerogative of mercy. It was God's testimony and sanction to that which was His moral witness in the world.

It is precisely in these circumstances that the obedience of faith comes in on which the blessing comes, as may be seen in Deuteronomy 30; not the insistence on literal ordinance, but the power of moral consistency, according to the expressed mind of God. Nothing can be more important than the position which this passage in the book of Deuteronomy holds in this respect, nor than the principle which it affords. The privileges attached to the dispensation were gone. Obedience, in the literal sense, was impossible. The ark was gone; the Urim and Thummim were gone. The temple, where literal services could be accomplished, was desolate and burned with fire, where their prescriptive services alone could be performed; and they were captives moving to and fro.

What then could be done! The word was nigh them, in their heart and in their mouth, that they might do it. Here was the principle of conduct which assured God's accepting favour; here is the principle on which alone, in darkness, we can walk acceptably with God. Compare Isaiah 50, 51, where we have the application of this—the progressive triple link of obedience; and then, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord!"

On the other hand, the notion of tradition neither recognises nor amends the fallen state of things; it does not recognise it, for it assumes the literal state of things precisely, but does not fulfil it. It does not acknowledge the evil and fallen state of the church. It assumes the continuance of that literal exactitude of services; and that, these being present, there is the security of the church. It acknowledges not, that it has lost its glory in the display of present power to the world; it says, Give me my ordinances, and all is well; not seeing that it has been deprived of power, because of its moral departure from its constitution with God. It may have been God's wisdom so to order this dispensation: I speak merely of the fact. Neither does tradition amend it—it puts the church wholly on the wrong ground. The spirit of obedience, the righteousness of faith, is that which we need, if indeed fallen. Though we had the most certain information of traditional forms of worship or ordinance, it would not make the church of the living God. It is not the sign of the true church, or suited to the humiliation of the church in its fallen and low condition. The perpetuity of ordinances is not its rightful position in Babylon, but the spirit of humbled obedience— the word nigh it; the present spirit of obedience to the word nigh them is that which marks the spirit of faith, and

acknowledgment of God, not making haste. If we repent, we may, according to the word of Ezekiel, be shewn more. To mock the fallen church with tradition is but a bitter and death-bearing substitute for the living power of the divine presence, or the obedience of faith, the only sure ground on which to stand, if we have fallen from the manifested glory of it.

But to trace the other parts of the subject. To shew that it is the preliminary of blessing, few words, after what has been said, will be needed. “If any man will do his will,” says our Lord, “he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” Now this is precisely the obedience of faith; and shews that moral preparation for blessing given is conversion of will into the spirit of obedience; “if any one desire to practise his will.” It is not the literal fact of outward act, but the spirit of mind, which will be therefore necessarily shewn in outward acts when that will is set before him. The next point is to do My mil; then he shall know—the gift of knowledge founded on the spirit of obedience; for what does it avail to confer gift on the disobedient, unless God should provide for His own dishonour?

I would refer also, without dwelling on them, to Luke 6:4-9; Matthew 3:15; John 13:16, 17 and ch. 12:26. The same truth is very distinctly taught us in John 14:21-23, where love to Jesus is thus definitely marked, and blessing marked as consequent upon it: “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.”

Nothing can be more distinct—nothing more distinct than the sovereignty of grace to the sinner through the obedience of Christ; the sureness of blessing to the saint in the order of obedience to the word. The chastenings of unchanging love, I speak not of here. But the doctrine is very express in the word as to the order of all special gift; that it is adherence to the obedience of Christ; that it hangs upon, and finds its scope and exercise in, obedience. There may be an extraordinary act of everlasting sovereignty, as Balaam and Caiaphas; but this is not ground that the church of God can go upon; these are not given to the church as examples, unless men would associate themselves with the apostasy as God's order. God may set light to His church upon the most dangerous rock on the shores of destruction; these may be beacons all around them, but no attractive guide to the place where they stand; though we may bless the hand that set them there, a warning for none to approach, though a guide to all that pass. Unhappy people, the witness of the ruin that rolls around themselves!

One would have thought that it had been amply enough to have seen the broad and essential principle on which the whole order of Christian truth is founded, to have determined the Christian mind as to its righteousness and judgment. One would have thought that its conclusion would have been intuitive, and the fruit of the Spirit shewn at once in the recognition of obedience as the path of the saint: that path which, to a saint led of the Spirit, is the only one in which the Spirit can lead. But the enemy of our souls is not met by the simplicity of truth, because of the want of simplicity of our minds. According as they are not spiritual, and in any sort are

under the influence of, or attached to, anything not the object of, to which they are not led by, the Spirit, therein the simplicity of truth fails to keep them, and the power of the enemy can avail itself of its subtlety against them. If there be any measure of positive, though imperfect spirituality, evident rejection of the word would not be received: but Satan does not so proceed. He does not therefore propose disobedience, but modifies obedience, proposes preliminaries to it, or substitutes something instead of God's word.

Nor does Satan deceive the saints, or those under the form of saints, with an open and simple lie (they are not the subjects of that); he has not ordinarily done so. If Satan said, "Ye shall be as gods (Elohim)," One far above all created beings repeated, "The man is become as one of us, knowing good and evil." But oh! what a store of accompanying evils and ruin, come in upon the act of disobedience founded on this devil-used truth. Using it out of place, suppressing what went along with it when man acted on it, was the foundation of the ruin that came upon the world.

We must then meet Satan, not only by the simplicity of truth, which is the happiest way—which is happiness—but, when our weakness and inconsistency open the way to his guile, by the wisdom of the word which applies to the case; which the unbounded and illimitable goodness of our God has provided for the weakness and necessities of His children, knowing the subtleties of their enemy, and providing for them who are assailable by reason of that weakness.

Thus the Lord (far, most far from inconsistency or evil, but assailed by that which would act upon ours) met, by

the testimony of the word, the subtlety of the enemy of our souls. What subtlety! an unconditional promise: a promise to Him, alleged to be His as Son of God, by virtue of His privilege: “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down hence, for it is written.” [Oh, high-drawn wit, a refinement of evil!] Was it not true? and was not Satan a liar? and could Satan produce a true promise of God, would not God be true to it? If thou be the Son of God, act in faith upon this promise; claim its effect, shew the power and glory which belong to this dispensation. And how bright the glory, how fair the witness, how singular and suitable the testimony to what He was! what strength imparted in His service! what foundation to claim credence to the mission which presented Him in this very character! Why not do it? What reason could be alleged? Must they not be the cavils of unbelief? Were the promises not true to the Son of God? Would God prove Himself a liar? It was the characteristic honour and place of Messiah; the ministering angels of the dispensation were to approve their Head in it: what could be more suitable or approved? But after all it was Satan’s proposal—the Lord’s answer was His total refusal. If a Son, He had yet made Himself a servant. There was no command on which to act; had there been, ten thousand temples would not have stopped His course, be they ever so goodly, ever so high, adorned with ever such goodly stones or gifts.

It is remarkable, too, in connection with what we have said as to Deuteronomy, that all our Lord’s answers were taken from it. The word “Lo-ammi” had never been erased from the badge of the Jewish people, since the day of their captivity; they bore it still upon their forehead: but the Lord took the part of Scripture

precisely applicable in their present state. He took the phylacteries of God therein afforded, and bound them round His forehead; and Satan could not touch Him then. And here was another most important principle connected with this subject. The promises of God were true, and the gifts and calling of God without repentance (and this passage refers directly hereto—to these very Jews); but they did not apply to their then present state. Satan would have used them so. But the path of obedience was to understand the mind of God; and the Lord applied, in their acknowledged apostasy, that which God had applied to that state of things.

The Jews applied the promises to themselves, without the recognition of their fallen estate, and herein shewed that they had not the Spirit of God; and, by their application of these promises of God, came under the power of Satan, and were led of him. The Lord declined them, and rejected and baffled Satan. He took and kept the path of simple obedience; He rejected tradition. He rejected the promises; aye, He rejected the promises used not in the path of obedience and the understanding of the divine word. The first evidence, the first point of the teaching of the divine Spirit, of the wisdom of God in Christ, who was the wisdom, is the ruined state itself into which the church is fallen. Here is the key, the at once solution of all the rest; where this is, it is and must be the first instruction of the Spirit to us in our church-acting capacity; and all our conduct flows from it; and God has expressly provided the obedience of faith for such a time, never, never deserting His own, wherever the apostasy may be; for He cannot, and does not, turn away, nor is His faith made of none effect; and in the time of all these difficulties, the Scriptures are able to

make us wise unto salvation (through faith which is in Christ Jesus), and are profitable, etc.; “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work.” Oh, what a blessed word! what a blight upon the holders of tradition, as the pretenders to any fight which should guide them farther than the perfectness of the man of God—the strength, the comfort, the wisdom of the divine word. May we be occupied with His commandments!

Let us turn to the third part of the subject—that obedience is the order of special gift. We have here direct and topical instruction of Scripture on the subject, in chapter 15 of John’s gospel. Of the principle of it we have an illustrious instance in Samson and his history. There was one separated to God, sanctified for Jehovah, and therefore put into the order of defined obedience; his hair was not to be cut. While the commandment and precept were observed, his strength was with him. There might have seemed little connection between long or uncut hair, and all-overcoming strength; but God was in it: and an obeyed, honoured, God is a God of strength to us. It was God’s strength, and given to one so definitely recognising Him; it was a gift hanging (as to its retention) on obedience—consistency with the undertaken vow of separated-ness to God. The surrender of this secret betrayed to the world the corrupting influence which had wound round the deceived Nazarite. His locks were cut by one nominally the friend and associate of the God-devoted man, in truth the sure ally of the Philistines, and suited instrument of Satan’s power. Once shorn of his strength, and in the Philistines’ hands, his eyes are put out; and, if in any sort he regains his strength, it is blindly to

destroy himself with his enemies. That which I insist on here, however, is the sign of separation to obedience being the order and hinge of the possession of the given strength, the presence or absence of the one depending upon the presence or absence of the other, however unconscious the unhappy victim was of the strength of others thereupon against him: a sorrowful yet instructive history to our weak and wayward will.

But I have referred to John 15, as direct instruction upon the subject: it is most exact as to it. The Lord had stated the truth as to personal blessing, the special gift of His manifested presence, as contrasted with the world, in chapter 14: “He that hath my commandments” (how different from a tradition we have not got!)2 “and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him.” Here the broad principle of general blessing is laid down, and we may observe what is most important in it— “he that hath my commandments.”

Let us turn to chapter 15:4, “Abide in me, and I in you; as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me.” This is a practical abiding, or it could not be a command; abiding in Christ as the true Vine, not in anything else; for the vine of the earth, its grapes shall be cast into the winepress of wrath. Again (v. 7), “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”; and in verse 10, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love”; that love from which all the gift and blessing flows, “even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” Would the church presumptuously assume a

higher prerogative of the sureness of the Father's love, than the Lord Himself, who says, as to the order of its continuance, "As I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love?" Can anything be more definite and clear, that the ground of the assumption of blessing, the continuance of gift or blessing, is continuance in the words of Christ, of His words in the church? The assertion is not more clear than the ground of it is most plain and intelligible—the holy commandment. God's power, His glory, would otherwise serve as the sanction of unrighteousness. So in verse 14 (stating the ground on which the communications of His mind, special revelations, would rest) He says, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Nothing can be more definite; nothing more certain, than its thrice repeated accuracy of assertion.

The order of God to Christians is, not obedience upon blessing, but blessing on obedience; not to wait for blessing in order to obey, but to act on the command, and the blessing follows. And this is faith. There would be no faith if the blessing came first. Even Christ obeyed before He had the blessing—speaking of Him as the self-humbled Man. So we are justified by bowing to God's word, and in our obedience are the consequent blessings: to him that hath shall more be given. It is the business of spirituality to ascertain His will-to be, in our measure, of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" If it be said, Yes, but the church had to wait for the presence of the Spirit before it could do anything, I answer, True; before then, properly speaking, it teas not a church; and even that was in obedience to the Lord's

word; Luke 24:49. But when the Spirit was received all that was so dictated became the subject-matter of the obedience of all who were under the influence of the Spirit thenceforward; and it was denying the Spirit to say, We must wait for the Spirit to obey what the Spirit has taught. It was mocking the Spirit. The Spirit of God had revealed it, and spirituality of mind would discern the holy purport of the thing—would surely do so, and art on it according to the power given, waiting for all other gift. Such is the necessary consequence of spirituality; and anything else is only denying the Spirit, not waiting for Him. He that is spiritual," says the apostle, "let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord"; and if so, what then? They are to be obeyed as the occasion and skill of obedience arises. Used in obedience, the gifts certainly were to be received in it also; for we are sanctified unto obedience. The church is sanctified unto obedience, becomes by conversion obedient: that is the thing done with it in time. The man is turned to obey God, instead of doing his own will: "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" And it receives blessing, it walks in obedience—the obedience of love, and it continues to receive a blessing; it disobeys, and received judgment, though God's long-suffering may wait upon its rebelliousness.

On the whole, the scripture is plain, as the principle is uniform—that obedience is the way of blessing; and that we are not to wait for power to obey a command, but to obey it that we may find power. The Lord did not restore the hand that He might stretch it out and shew it, but ordered the man to stretch it out, that it might be restored. And this is true in all possible cases. The Lord

is obedient; therefore He is exalted to the place of power, to be Giver of gifts. He took upon Him the form of a servant, and became obedient, and that even to death; wherefore also God hath highly exalted Him. Now while the redemption of the church is herein complete (for, by one man's obedience, many shall be made righteous), in the work in the church, obedience always goes before the manifestation of blessing. Thus Saul, struck to the ground, says, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and the Lord answered, "Go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee what thou oughtest to do." He went and received comfort, and strength, and blessing, through the means of Ananias there sent to him; he acted in obedience in the first instance. So the poor blind man, in the days of the Lord, being, in the flesh, a pattern and type of the whole case: "Go wash in the pool of Siloam: he went his way therefore and washed, and came seeing"; and, having been faithful to this, he was able to teach his teachers, because he had obeyed the word; and, being cast out for it, the Lord hearing this to be the case, finds him, and reveals Himself to him. Is it then that we act without the obedience of faith? We are so led: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." "Go wash in Jordan seven times" is an humbling thing, instead of having the prophet's hand struck over the leper; but going and washing proved that he believed the testimony of God—the Spirit of God to be in the prophet; he owned the Spirit when in the obedience of faith, and the blessing came.

So in the word we own the Spirit of God, the sure Spirit of God in the word, and act upon it: which shews that we own the Spirit of God, and that He is able to bless; and

the blessing comes from that Spirit, vindicating His truth. Whatever blessing is inconsistent with obedience is not really a blessing in result, though it should have the form of an answer to claim on the faithfulness of God; as we see in the quails in the wilderness. Our whole inquiry must just be, What is the will of God? The blessing of the Spirit goes with it, for that is the testimony of the Spirit; and, taking it as the way of the blessing is honouring the Spirit. Therefore the very acknowledging the Lord is made a matter of obedience. It is the command of God to acknowledge His Son (1 John 3:23), to honour Him as we honour the Father. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Yea, the Lord, while He shewed that He loved the Father, yet, in His yielding Himself to death, declares, "This commandment have I received of my Father"; and the gospel is sent "for the obedience of faith among all nations for his name."

The operation of the Spirit is to make us obey. There is no owning of the Spirit but in obedience; and obedience is the evidence that we do acknowledge the Spirit, that we are led of Him—that which God will own, whether the world own us or not. And I suppose that the highest progress of spiritual life is not energy, but the enlarged discovery that all is within the sphere of obedience; and that all our efforts are so far profitable as they are within obedience—God's prescribed order; and that all without is the energy of our own will, and evil. Does the spirit of evil or our will lead us in obedience? Clearly not! We have only then to plead the word, and we necessarily plead the operation of the Spirit of God in us; His energy is but to enable us to obey, and to reduce all else to the same thing.

Our having the commandments is the sign of an obedient heart taught of God—the communicated apprehension of the divine mind as in the word, spiritual communion with God giving that discernment; our keeping them, of a patient will under Him to follow on as led and established by Him, and in spite of, and overcoming the enemy; God working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

To lean upon tradition is to prove that we have not His commandments; to wait, as men speak, for His Spirit is to prove that we are not inclined to keep them; both concurring to shew that we do not really love Him; and the latter, the merest though most subtle sophistry, and making us deny obedience to the word of the Spirit, in order that we may obtain His presence: a way as strange in its proposal, as it is contrary to the word of God (as we have seen in John 15); denying that we have it whereby alone we can have it or obey it, whereby we have it more abundantly; a hiding of the talent in the napkin, as though God were an austere God.

Our whole dependence then is on the Spirit of God, for we have no strength in ourselves; the object of our desires and prayers, the great and continual object, all hangs on His presence; for by it alone we recognise ever what the Father and the Son are to us in the blessed counsels of His will—we recognise it as a present thing.

The Spirit is the immediate agent in all divinely led human conduct, as indeed in all operation on creation. But the measure of the Spirit is known by the obedience of faith—the understanding obedience of faith, to that which the Spirit has laid before us in the word of truth—the true revealed mind of the Spirit of God. Whatever

the power, we shall ever seek increase as to its exercise under the divine will. He will ever lead us on farther and farther into the path of obedience, and will unfailingly sanction all our previous footsteps in this way; for indeed, howsoever little known, He has led us in them.

1 1838

2 The Lord’s commandments are always moral, and not of ordinance. The two ordinances which were established by Him, and which separate the church from the world, are, though ordained by Him, not commandments for personal obedience. As to baptism, this is perfectly clear, from the absence of command, and from Acts 8:36 and 10:47. As regards the Lord’s supper, it might seem to be so, but “Do this in remembrance of me “is not a command to do it; compare 1 Corinthians 11:25. Ordinances are always separative. If I am marked by any prescribed act, this act distinguishes me, and connects me with all those who have it as a body, contrasted with those who have not such prescribed form. Hence all peculiar ordinances minister to separation among Christians, those that are God’s to separation of them from the world corporately. I read, “we have no such custom,” where evil was sought to be introduced; never of any circumstance, we have such an ordinance. I do not think the apostles themselves had the power to ordain anything, but as morally conducive to the good of the church. “So ordain I in all the churches” was a common order profitable for the glory of God.

How To Know The Will Of The Father

Editor's Note3

If a child habitually neglected its father, and did not take the trouble of knowing his mind and will, it is easy to foresee that, when a difficulty presented itself this child would not be in circumstances to understand what would please its parent. There are certain things which God leaves in generalities, in order that the state of the individual’s soul may be proved. If, instead of the case I have supposed of a child, it were a question of a wife towards her husband, it is probable that, if she had the feelings and mind of a wife, she would not hesitate a moment as to knowing what would be agreeable to him; and this where he had expressed no positive will about the matter. Now you cannot escape this trial: God will not allow His children to escape it. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

People would like a convenient and comfortable means of knowing God’s will, as one might get a receipt for anything; but there exists no means of ascertaining it without reference to the state of our own soul. Moreover, we are often of too much importance in our own eyes; and we deceive ourselves in supposing some will of God in such or such a case. God perhaps has nothing to tell us thereon, the evil being altogether in the stir we give ourselves. The will of God is perhaps that we should take quietly an insignificant place.

Further, we sometimes seek God’s will, desiring to know how to act in circumstances in which His only will is that we should not be found at all; and where, if conscience were really in activity, its first effect would be to make

us leave them. It is our own will which sets us there, and we should like nevertheless to enjoy the comfort of being guided of God in a path which we ourselves have chosen. Such is a very common case.

Be assured that, if we are near enough to God, we shall not be at a loss to know His will. In a long and active life it may happen, that God, in His love, may not always at once reveal His will to us, that we may feel our dependence, particularly where the individual has a tendency to act according to his own will. However, “if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light”; whence it is certain that, if the whole body is not full of light, the eye is not single. You will say, That is poor consolation. I answer it is rich consolation for those whose sole desire is to have the eye single and to walk with God—not, so to speak, to avoid this trouble in learning His will objectively, but whose desire is to walk with God. “If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.” It is always the same principle. “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” You cannot exempt yourself from this moral law of Christianity. “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing by the knowledge of God.” The mutual connection of these things is of immense importance for the soul. The Lord must be known intimately if one would walk in a way worthy of Him; and it is thus that we grow in the

knowledge of God's will. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ." Finally, it is written that the spiritual man "judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."

It is then the will of God, and a precious will, that we should be able to discern it only according to our own spiritual state. In general, when we think that we are judging circumstances, it is God who is judging us—who is judging our state. Our business is to keep close to Him. God would not be good to us, if He permitted us to discover His will without that. It might be convenient just to have a director of consciences; and we should thus be spared the discovery and the chastisement of our moral condition. Thus, if you seek how you may discover the will of God without that, you are seeking evil; and it is what we see every day. One Christian is in doubt, in perplexity; another, more spiritual, sees as clear as the day, and he is surprised, sees no difficulty, and ends by understanding that it lies only in the other's state of soul. "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off."

As regards circumstances, I believe that a person may be guided by them: Scripture has decided that. It is what is meant by being "held in with bit and bridle"; whereas the promise and privilege of him who has faith is, "I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." God who is faithful has given the promise of directing us thus—near enough to God to understand by a single glance from Him. He warns us not to be as the horse and the mule which have no understanding of the will, thoughts,

or desires of their master. It is needful to hold them in with bit and bridle. Doubtless even that is better than to stumble, fall and run counter to Him who holds us in; but it is a sad state, and such it is to be guided by circumstances. Undoubtedly, too, it is merciful on God's part so to act, but very sad on ours.

Here, however, there must be a distinction drawn between judging what one has to do in certain circumstances, and being guided by them. He who allows himself to be guided by them always acts in the dark as to knowing the will of God. There is absolutely nothing moral in it; it is an external force that constrains. Now it is very possible that I may have no judgment beforehand of what I shall do: I know not what circumstances may arise, and consequently I can make no resolutions. But the instant the circumstances are there, I judge with a full and divine conviction what is the path of God's will, and of the Spirit's intention and power. That demands the highest degree of spirituality. It is not to be directed by circumstances, but to be directed by God in them, being near enough to God to be able to judge immediately what one ought to do, as soon as the circumstances are there.

As to impressions, God can suggest them, and it is certain that in fact He does suggest a thing to the mind; but, in that case, the propriety of the thing and its moral character will be as clear as the sun at noon-day. In prayer God can remove from our heart certain carnal influences, which, being destroyed, leave room for certain other spiritual influences taking all their place in the soul. Thus He makes us feel the importance of some duty, which had been perhaps entirely obscured by pre-occupation caused by some desired object. This may be

even between two individuals. One person may not have enough spiritual discernment to discover what is right; but the moment another shews it to him, he understands that it is the truth. All are not engineers, but a simple wagoner knows a good road when it is made. Thus the impressions which come from God do not always remain simple impressions. But they are ordinarily clear when God produces them. I do not doubt, however, that He often makes them on our minds, when we walk with Him and listen to His voice.

When obstacles raised up of Satan are spoken of, it is not said that God Himself may not have allowed these obstacles to some good desire—obstacles caused by an accumulation of evil in the circumstances which surround us.

Again the case should never exist of a person acting without knowing the will of God. The only rule that can be given is, never to act when we do not know what is the Lord's will. The will of God ought to be the motive as well as the rule of our conduct; and until His will is in activity, there is an absence of any true motive for ours. If you act in ignorance in this respect, you are at the mercy of circumstances; however God may turn all to the good of His children. But why act when we are ignorant what His will is? Is the necessity of acting always so extremely pressing? If I do something with the full certainty that I am doing the will of God, it is clear that an obstacle is no more than a test of my faith, and it ought not to stop me. It stops us perhaps through our lack of faith; because, if we do not walk sufficiently near to God in the sense of our nothingness, we shall lack faith to accomplish what we have faith enough to discern. When we are doing our own will or are

negligent in our walk, God in His mercy may warn us by a hindrance which arrests us if we pay attention to it, whilst “the simple pass on and are punished.” God may permit, where there is much activity and labour, that Satan should raise up hindrances, in order that we may be kept in dependence on the Lord; but God never permits Satan to act otherwise than on the flesh. If we leave the door open, if we get away from God, Satan does us harm; but otherwise it is a mere trial of faith to warn us of a danger or snare—of something that would tend to exalt us in our own eyes. It is an instrument for our correction. That is, God allows Satan to trouble the mind, and make the flesh surfer outwardly, in order that the inner man may be kept from evil. If it is a question of anything else, probably it is only our “buts” and “ifs” that stop us, or possibly the effects of our carelessness, which has opened a door to Satan to trouble us by doubts and apparent difficulties between God and us, because we do not see more clearly. For “he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” In a word, the question is wholly moral. If any particular question is raised which at the first blush we cannot solve, we shall find that often there would be no such question there at all, if our position were not false—if we had previously been in a good state of soul, and a true spirituality had guarded and kept us. In that case, all we have to do is to humble ourselves for the whole affair.

Now let us examine whether Scripture does not present some principle suitable to direct us. Here evidently spirituality is the essential thing—is everything. The rule that we should do what Jesus would have done in such and such a circumstance is excellent, where and when it

can be applied. But are we often in the circumstances where the Lord was found?

In the next place, it is often useful to ask myself whence comes such a desire of mine, or such a thought of doing this or that. I have found that this alone decides more than half of the difficulties that Christians meet with. The rest of those which remain are the result of our haste and of our former sins. If a thought comes from God and not from the flesh, then we have only to address ourselves to God as to the manner and means of executing it, and we shall soon be directed. There are cases where one has need of being guided, not always without motives; as suppose, when I hesitate about a visit to make, or some such other case. A life of more ardent love, or love exercised in a more intelligent way, or set in activity in drawing near to God, will clear the motives on one side or another: and often, perhaps, we shall see that our part in the thing was but selfishness.

If it be asked, But if it is no question either of love or of obedience? then I answer, that you ought to shew me a reason for acting. For if it is nothing but your own will, you cannot make the wisdom of God bend to your will. Therein also is the source of another numerous class of difficulties that God will never solve. In these cases, He will in His grace teach obedience, and will shew us how much time we have lost in our own activity. Finally “the meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.”

I have communicated to you on this subject all that my mind can furnish you with at this moment. For the rest, remember only that the wisdom of God conducts us in the way of God’s will: if our own will is in activity, God

cannot bend to that. That is the essential thing to discover. It is the secret of the life of Christ. I know no other principle that God can make use of, however He may pardon and cause all to work for our good. If there still be a query as to His direction, He directs the new man which has no other will than Christ. He mortifies and puts to death the old man, and in that way purifies us that we may bear fruit. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God… I delight to do thy will.” It is the place of a porter to wait at the gate; but, in doing so, he does the will of his master. Be assured that God does more in us than we for Him; and that what we do is only for Him in proportion as it is He Himself who works it in us.

I add with regard to a principle expressed above, that we are sanctified to the “obedience… of Jesus Christ.” Now He came to do the will of His Father, without which He did nothing. Thus, in the temptation in the wilderness, Satan tried to make Him act according to His own will, in things where there was not even an appearance of evil. The Father had just owned Him as His Son: Satan tempted Him, saying, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” But Jesus was a servant, and His answer consists in doing nothing, because there was wholly no will of His Father in the matter: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” As there was no word from God for the actual circumstances, Jesus did nothing. Satan could do nothing more. Although ever active to do good, He did not stir, when Mary and Martha sent to tell Him “he whom thou lovest is sick.” His Father had not sent Him there. When He goes later, the wisdom of God is thus manifested, in that a testimony to the divine power of

Jesus as Son of God was rendered by the resurrection of Lazarus. So then, when the will of God is not manifested, our wisdom often consists in waiting until it should be. It is the will of God that, zealous of good works, we should do good always, but we cannot go before the time, and the work of God is done perfectly when it is He who does it.

3 Extract from a Letter, translated from the French.

“I Will Guide Thee With Mine Eye”

Psalm 32:8, 9

There are three special characters of blessing mentioned in the Psalms.

First, that which we get at the very opening of them: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,” etc.; Ps. 1. It is here a contrast between the ungodly and Christ, the righteous Man.

In Psalm 119 we go a little farther. This psalm speaks of having wandered, and of being restored (v. 67, 71, 176). It is here, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of Jehovah.” It speaks of one who has the word, delights in it, looks to it, and seeks to be guided by it; still it is not so absolute.

In the psalm before us (Ps. 32), we get the blessedness of, and God’s dealings with, the sinner whose transgressions are removed. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered [not who has not transgressed, who has not sinned]. Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile “(that is, the restored soul).

It is important to notice the work of the Spirit of God, in the process through which the soul is going here (as it says, “Thy hand was heavy upon me”), God’s dealings with the soul that does not submit itself entirely in

bringing it down into full subjection and confession. “When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin,” v. 2-5. This is always true, if the Lord’s hand is upon a man, until he recognises the evil before God; and then there is forgiveness of the iniquity. It is very important that we should distinguish the government of God towards our souls in forgiveness.

Until there is confession of sin, and not merely of a sin, there is no forgiveness. We find David, in Psalm 51, when he was confessing his sin, saying, “Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and m sin did my mother conceive me,” etc., not merely, I have done this particular evil; that he does (v. 1-4); but he recognises the root and principle of sin. When our hearts are brought to recognise God’s hand, it is not merely, then, a question of what particular sin, or of what particular iniquity may need forgiveness; God has brought down the soul, through the working of His Spirit on it, to detect the principle of sin, and so there is confession of that, and not merely of a particular sin. There is then positive restoration of soul.

Now this is a much deeper thing in its practical consequences, and the Lord’s dealings thereon, than we are apt to suppose. Freed from the bondage of things which hinder its intercourse with God, the soul learns to lean upon God, instead of upon those things which, so to speak, had taken the place of God. “For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou

mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance," v. 6, 7. There is its confidence.

And then follows what, more especially, is the object of this paper— "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle lest they come near unto thee," v. 8, 9.

Now we are often like the horse, or the mule, every one of us—and this, because our souls have not been ploughed up. When there is anything in which the will of man is at work, the Lord deals with us, as with the horse or the mule, holding us in. When every part of the heart is in contact with Himself, He guides us with His "eye." "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light," Luke 11:34-36. When there is anything wherein the eye is not single, so long as this is the case, there is not free intercourse in heart and affections with God; and the consequence is, our mil not being subdued, we are not led simply of God. When the heart is in a right state, the whole body is "full of light," and there is the quick perception of the will of God. He just teaches us by His "eye" all He wishes, and produces in us quickness of understanding in His fear; Isaiah 11:3. This is our

portion, as having the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, “quick of understanding in the fear of Jehovah,” hearts without any object, save the will and glory of God. And that is just what Christ was: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart,” Ps. 40:7, 8; Heb. 10:7. Where there is this, it may be bitter and painful as to the circumstances of the path, but there is in it the joy of obedience as obedience. There is always joy, and the consequence—God guiding us by His eye.

Before anything can be done, if we have not this certainty, before we enter upon any particular service, we should seek to get it, judging our own hearts as to what may be hindering. Suppose I set about doing a thing, and meet with difficulties, I shall begin to be uncertain as to whether it is God’s mind or not; and hence, there will be feebleness and discouragement. But on the other hand, if acting in the intelligence of God’s mind in communion, I shall be “more than conqueror,” whatever may meet me by the way; Rom. 8:37. And note here: not only does the power of faith, in the path of faith, remove mountains; but the Lord deals morally, and will not let me find out His way, unless there be in me the spirit of obedience. What would it avail—unless indeed God should provide for His own dishonour? “If any man will do [wills to do] his will,” says our Lord, “he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,” John 7:17. This is precisely the obedience of faith. The heart must be in the condition of obedience, as Christ’s was, “Lo, I come,” etc. The apostle speaks to the Colossians of being “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,” Col. 1:9. Here it is quickness of

understanding in the fear of the Lord, the condition of a man's own soul, though his spirit of mind will be necessarily shewn in outward acts, when that will is set before him; as Paul goes on to say, "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful unto every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Here then is the blessed joyful state of being guided by God's "eye." "I have meat to eat," says our Lord to the disciples (John 4), "that ye know not of." And what was that meat? "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

The Lord guides, or rather controls, us in another way by providential circumstances, so that we may not go wrong, even though we are those which have no understanding. And thankful we ought to be that He does so. But it is only as the horse or mule. Your will being subject to Mine, He says, "I will guide you with mine eye"—but, if you are not subject, I must keep you in with "bit and bridle." This is, evidently, a very different thing.

May our hearts be led to desire to know and to do God's will. It will then be not so much a question of what that will is, but of knowing and doing God's will. And then we shall have the certain and blessed knowledge of being guided by His "eye." There is all this government of God with those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile—whose whole dependence is upon Him, and who feel they are sure to go wrong if not guided by Himself.

There is a guidance with knowledge, and there is also guidance without knowledge. The former is our blessed privilege; but it may be the latter is needed to humble us. In Christ there was everything exactly according to God. In a certain sense He had no character. When I look at Him, what do I see? A constant never-failing life —manifestation of obedience. He goes up to Bethany just when He is to go up, regardless of the fears of the disciples; He abides two days still in the same place where He is, after He has heard that Lazarus is sick; John 11. He has nothing but to do all, to accomplish all, for the glory of God. One man is tender and soft; in another firmness and decision predominate. There is great diversity of character amongst men. You do not see that in Christ at all; there is no unevenness; every faculty in His humanity obeyed, and was the instrument of the impulse the divine will gave to it.

Divine life has to be guided in a vessel that has constantly to be kept down. Thus even for the apostle the command not to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:7) was not guidance by the Spirit of the highest sort. It was blessed guidance, yet not the highest character of guidance an apostle knew. It was more like the government of the horse or the mule, not so much the intelligence of God’s mind in communion.

A great range of the guidance of the Spirit is just what we get in Colossians 1:9-11 to those in communion with God. There we find the individual to be “filled with the knowledge of his will.” The Holy Ghost guides into the knowledge of the divine will, and there is no occasion even to pray about it. If I have spiritual understanding about a given tiling, it may be the result of a great deal of previous prayer, and not necessarily of the things

having been prayed about at the time. One has often had to pray about a thing, because not in communion. I may have my mind exercised about that to-day, honestly, truly, graciously exercised, which, five years hence, it might be, I should not have a doubt about. When God is using us, if we are free from ourselves, He may put it into our hearts to go here, or to go there; then God is positively guiding us. But this assumes a person to be walking with God, and that diligently; it assumes death to self. If we are walking humbly, God will guide us. I may be in a certain place, and there have one say to me, Will you go to —— (naming some other place)? Now, if I have not the mind of God, as to my going or otherwise, I shall have to pray for guidance; but this, of course, assumes that I am not walking in the knowledge of God's mind. I may have motives pulling me one way or the other, and clouding my spiritual judgment. The Lord says (John 11)—when the disciples speak of the Jews having of late sought to stone Him, and ask, "Goest thou thither again?"— "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." This is just an application of the simple fact, that, if walking in the night, I must be on the look-out for stones, lest I stumble over them. So Paul prays for the Philippians, that their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that they might approve things that are excellent [try things that differ]; that they might be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, without a single stumble all the way along. Many speak of providence as a guide. Providence does sometimes control, but it never, properly speaking, guides us; it guides things. If I am going to a place to

preach, and I find, when I get to the terminus, that the train has started, God has ordered things about me (and I may have to be thankful for the over-ruling); but it is not God's guiding me; for I should really have gone, had the train not left: my will was to go. All we get of this guidance of providence is very blessed; but it is not guidance by the Spirit of God, not guidance by the "eye," but rather by the "bit" of God. Though providence over-rules, it does not, properly speaking, guide.

“The Spirit, Not Of Fear, But Of Power”

2 Timothy 1:3-8

Such exhortations are never given unless there are circumstances to require it. They are intended to meet some tendency in the flesh, that we may guard against it in the Spirit. It is well to remember how the Lord deals with us, just as we are; how, in all His ways, He takes into account the circumstances we are in, and does not, like philosophy, take us into other circumstances.

With regard to our cares and trials, Christ does not take us out of them. “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world.” While He leaves us in the world, He leaves us liable to all that is incidental to man; but, in the new nature, teaches us to lean on God. The thought with us often is, that (because we are Christians) we are to get away from trials; or else, if in them, we are not to feel them. This is not God’s thought concerning us.

The theoretical Christian may be placid and calm; he has fine books and nice sayings; but, when he has something from God to ruffle his placidity, you will find he is a Christian more conscious of the difficulties there are in the world, and of the difficulty of getting over such. The nearer a man walks with God through grace, the more tender he becomes as to the faults of others; the longer he lives as a saint, the more conscious of the faithfulness and tenderness of God, and of what it has been applied to in himself.

See the life of the Lord Jesus; take Gethsemane, what do we find? Never a cloud over His soul, uniform placidity.

You never see Him off His centre. He is always Himself. But take the Psalms, and do we find nothing within to break the placidity? The Psalms bring out what was passing within. In the gospels He is presented to man, as the testimony of the power of God with Him, in those very things that would have vexed man. He walked with God about them; and so we find Him in perfect peace, saying with calmness, “Whom seek ye?” — “I am he.” How peaceful! How commanding! (for peace in the midst of difficulties does command.) When by Himself, in an agony, He sweats as it were great drops of blood; it was not a placidity because He had not heart feeling within. He felt the full trial, in spirit; but God was always with Him in the circumstances, and, therefore, He was uniformly calm before men.

We are not to expect never to be exercised, or troubled, or cast down, as though we were without feeling. “They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” He thoroughly felt it all. The iron entered into His soul. “Reproach,” He says, “hath broken my heart.” But there is this difference between Christ in suffering and affliction, and ourselves; with Him there was never an instant elapsed between the trial and communion with God. This is not the case with us. We have first to find out that we are weak, and cannot help ourselves; then we turn and look to God.

Where was Paul when He said “All men forsook me”? His confidence in God was not shaken; but looking around him, by the time he got to the end of his ministry, his heart was broken because of the unfaithfulness. He saw the flood of evil coming in (chaps. 3 and 4), and the danger of Timothy’s being left alone, looking at the evil, and feeling his own weakness; and so (lest Timothy

should get into a spirit of fear), he says, “Stir up the gift that is in thee,4… for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou, therefore, ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” If we have got the spirit of fear, this is not of God, for God has given us the spirit of power. He has met the whole power of the enemy in the weakness of man, in Christ, and Christ is now set down on the right hand of the majesty on high.

“Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God.” What! a partaker of afflictions? Yes. Of deliverance from the sense of them? No—a partaker of afflictions that may be felt as a man, but “according to the power of God!” This is not in not feeling the pressure of sorrow and weakness. Paul had a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12); and did he not feel it, think you? Ay, he felt it daily; and as “a messenger of Satan to buffet him” withal. And what did he say? “Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities [in those things in which I am sensibly weak], that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” The power of God coming in on our side does not lessen the feeling to us; but we “cast all our care upon him, for he careth for us.” Not that at the very moment we refer it to God we shall get an answer. Daniel had to wait three full weeks for an answer from God; but from the first day that he set his heart to understand and to chasten himself before his God, his words were heard; Dan. 10. With us the first thing often is to think about the thing and begin to work in our own minds, before we go to God. There was none of this in Christ. “At that time, Jesus answered and said,

I thank thee, O Father," etc.; Matt. 11. We weary ourselves in the greatness of our way.

"Be careful for nothing," Phil. 4:6. That is easily said. But what! not be careful about the state of the church, or about the pressure of a family? etc. "Be careful for nothing." Whatever produces a care in us, produces God's care for us; therefore "be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." So, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ": not your hearts keep the peace of God; but the peace that God Himself is in, His peace, the unmoved stability of all God's thoughts, keep your hearts.

Further, when not careful, the mind set free, and the peace of God keeping the heart, God sets the soul thinking on happy things. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest—just—pure—lovely, of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." God is there the companion of the soul; not merely "the peace of God," but "the God of peace."

When the soul is cast upon God, the Lord is with the soul in the trial, and the mind is kept perfectly calm. The Spirit of love, the Spirit of Christ, is there; if thinking of myself, this is the spirit of selfishness.

4 This passage connects the exercise of gift with the spiritual state. "God has net given us the spirit of fear ": therefore do not be discouraged, though the state of

things is so melancholy. Again, in Philippians, they were to be “in nothing terrified by their adversaries.”

Faith Furnished For The Evil Day

Ephesians 6:10-24

The very blessings of the church set us in a sort of conflict, that, without such blessings, we should not have. Thus we are subject to more of failure and evil. A Jew might do many things that would be monstrous in a Christian, and find no defilement of conscience. The veil being rent, the light shines out, and the consequence is, that the light coming from the holiest cannot tolerate evil. Blessed be God! we have power to meet the difficulties of our position; and this epistle brings out the provision which God has made for the saints.

The church is seated “in heavenly places in Christ” (chap. 2:6)—blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; chap. 1:3. So also are we said to contend with spiritual wickedness in heavenly places (v. 12). We are carried into conflict in the very place of strength; for the nearer we are to God, the more we want strength to walk there.

Israel, when they got into the land, found the consequences of sin desperate. What a terrible slaughter at Ai, for the sin of Achan!; Josh. 7. And again, the consequences of neglecting to ask counsel of the Lord about the men of Gibeon went on for generations, even to Saul’s time; 2 Sam. 21. In the land, where God was and took His place, the consequences of sin were proportionate.

By virtue of our privileges we get this conflict. Moreover, if you and I have more knowledge than many other Christians, there will be more dishonour and failure

amongst us than amongst other Christians, unless we are walking according to the light.

“Be strong in the Lord,” v. 10. Here is the place of strength—strength found only in Him. Whatever instrumentality He may be pleased to use, there is no object of faith but the Lord Himself. Whilst there is nothing more blessed than the ministry of the word, and also, if I have been instrumental in the conversion of a soul, through God’s blessing, that soul will cleave to me, and rightly so, it is of God and God owns it (for if He breaks that which is of the flesh, He creates that which is of the Spirit: God gives it—it may be abused, yet God makes the link between the one blessed and the instrument), yet you cannot exercise faith in man, you cannot put your dependence on man. It is true, there is this link; but it is because the soul is brought to Christ. This alone is conversion. And here is the place of strength. There is no strength but in Christ. I have none, at any time, except as my soul is in secret communion with Him, and (through Him) with God the Father. Now the direct power of Satan is towards this point, to keep our souls from living on Christ.

What we call duties, but what God calls “cares,” often separate from Christ. They fatigue and oppress the soul: and, if the saints do not cast all this on Christ, they unnerve themselves by things which distract the mind. The person says, I do not enjoy Christ; he knows not how it is, but thinks it is from the pressure of unavoidable care; whilst, in truth, it is the effect and result of having sought his resource elsewhere than in Christ. The soul has got distressed because it has not found Christ in the suffering, and this has thrown it toward something that is not Christ, something that (to

human sight) promised fair. Thus it gets a taste for mere idle things. What we are led to by the Spirit is to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." It is no good talking of cares: Satan is behind them all; it is no good talking of difficulties: Satan is behind the difficulties, thrusting them on to shake the power of the word in us; and we may be quite sure of this that, if not in communion, Satan will have the advantage of us, because these cares, etc., are not about Christ. I have all to do to, and for, Christ. He will make us feel our dependence, but it is never falsified.

Whilst thus oppressed with the turmoils of life, it is ever a truth, that we are not in the strength of Christ, for He is stronger than the shop or the family or any other care. It may be I am occupied with something I ought not to be; if I cannot do it, "to the Lord," I ought not to do it. It is quite certain that Christ's strength does carry us through everything, no matter what the difficulties are: we shall feel them, we may groan under them; but when I can say, with David, "It is God that girdeth me with strength "(Ps. 18), the enemy may come against me— "a bow of steel is broken by my arms." The Lord made him triumph over all.

It is in difficulties that we learn this strength. Hence in little things the believer is apt to forget, that our whole dependence is to be "strong in the Lord"; that is, not being taken out of the place of conscious weakness. Paul says, "I was with you in weakness," etc. (i Cor. 2:3); so, again: "without were fightings, within were fears," 2 Cor. 7:5. It is not that the saint will be able to say, I am strong, when put into difficulties: these make us lean on Christ, when in them, and strength is always there —"strength made perfect in weakness" (a consciousness

of weakness). The whole truth of it is in the spirit of dependence, whether we see bright light or not. Paul said, “I glory in mine infirmities” —why? Because they made him lean on Christ. Faith, in exercise, is strengthened, and Christ giveth light to him that wakes up: “unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness.” The reason why a saint, who has had a great deal of joy, often gets into failure is, because it has taken him away from the present consciousness of dependence; the very goodness of the Lord has made him enjoy himself. There is always a tendency for the flesh to slip in.

After shewing the place of the Christian’s strength, the apostle says, “Put on the whole armour of God,” v. 11. The great thing is, that it is God’s armour. There is no standing against Satan without this. What is not of God fails. If ever so skilful in argument, and able to confute an opposer with the truth, I have nevertheless done him no good, and myself much harm, because I was acting in the flesh: Satan was working on me, and not God. Whenever it is God’s armour, it must be by faith, and in secret communion with God. There is the departure from all strength, when we lose this; not anything we know will be of use—the word of God even, for it is the “sword of the Spirit,” and it is shut up. Strength is always the effect of having to do with God in the spirit of dependence. In the exercise of this dependence, I may have such a blessed sense of His power, that I may triumph over all; but whether in trial or in triumph, I shall be strong in a sense of dependence. If Moses’ hands were not upheld, Amalek prevailed; Ex. 17. One who looked on might have been astonished at seeing Amalek prevail at certain times, and would be calculating about the array (the advantages or

disadvantages of the array) in which Israel were set; but the secret was, when Amalek prevailed, Moses' hands were hanging down. It was not because Joshua was not in the blessed place of doing God's work, but because the act of dependence on God was stayed. If my mind has been exercised about a brother, and in walking along the streets, on my way to him, I get apart from God, I shall do him no good, though I say ever so much to him.

See the contrast between Jonathan and Saul (1 Sam. 14) — between confidence in God overcoming difficulties, and self failing, with all the resources of royalty. Jonathan clambers up upon his hands and feet, confident in God, and the enemy falls before him. Saul, when he sees the Lord's work going on, not knowing the Lord's mind, calls for the priest. It may be that he had a right intention, but certainly not simplicity of dependence on God (when inquiring what he should do); and he spoils all by his foolish oath. It was said of Jonathan, "He hath wrought with God this day." God was with him, and he had strength and liberty. When we are walking in dependence upon God, there will always be liberty before God. Jonathan knew what he should do, and took some honey, because he went on in liberty, for God was with him; whilst Saul, in legality, put himself and the people into bondage. Unless we are dependent on God, the very things that would be our armour will be weapons against us, striking friends instead of enemies, or injuring ourselves.

Observe it is said, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" — "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may withstand in the evil day," etc. (v. 13). If I saw a person

going into battle without a shield, and without his helmet, etc., I should say he was mad. One living in theory might not have it; but, if we live near enough to God, to be practically in conflict, we shall need “the whole armour.” If we pray without searching the word, or read the word without prayer, we may get no guidance. Jesus said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you,” John 15:7. Without this, I may be asking some foolish thing that will not be given.

Conscious weakness causes a saint not to dare to move without God. I cannot go to meet an enemy with the word and without prayer. If I felt as a sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 11:16), I should be aware of my weakness. I may be, like an antiquary, occupied with the theory of the armour, and not putting it on, not having any real dependence on God.

We have to stand against the wiles of the devil (it is not said his power). As soon as I see them I can avoid them. But after all it is not knowing Satan that keeps us intelligent of and able in discovering his “wiles,” but keeping in God’s presence. It was always so with Christ. Even Peter’s affection tried to make the cross ugly to Him; Matt. 16:22. Jesus resisted Satan and discovered his wiles; He not only always received things from above, but in the spirit of dependence on God. The moment we know the thing to be of Satan, the temptation is over if we are walking with God. When the devil came to our Lord (Matt. 4), Christ did not at once say to him, Thou art Satan; that would have been only shewing His power. He acted as the obedient Man, and thus foiled the tempter. When the devil claims worship, He then says, “Get thee hence, Satan.” To discern his

“wiles,” we should see whether the thing proposed leads from obedience to Christ; if it does, no matter who proposes, I must reject it. The devil has this character of subtilty (not always of open opposition), as the serpent (see 2 Cor. 11:3); but the place of obedience to God will always upset him.

This is a remarkable expression— “the evil day,” v. 13. It supposes, in a general way, all this present time, for it is the time of Satan’s temptations; but then there are certain circumstances which cause Satan’s power to be more exercised at one season than another. There is a time when the soul will be put to it. It is different to be going on in energy against Satan, and exercising the triumphs of victory, enjoying the triumphs; we may be walking in an energy that overcomes all opposition, or in the conscious weakness of being hardly able to stand. A soul often gets an “evil day” after triumphing through Christ. There may be exaltation in the remembrance of the triumph, and a new source of trial and dependence comes. I may give up the world and be so very happy in the esteem and love of Christians as may bring out a bit of the flesh lower down. A saint often gets into this state, having gone on for a while in the strength of former conquests. A fresh battle comes; and, if he is not prepared for this, he is overcome for a season. The place of strength is always that of being forced to lean on God. As noticed before, respecting David,5 what a contrast between his songs of deliverance and thanksgiving to God, and the mournful words, “My house is not so with God,” 2 Sam. 22 and 23.

The saint that always fears God, is always strong, for God is always with him; the secret of his strength is, he has God on his side. We are apt to look at means, even

right means, and forget God. The most important victory has often come, when we have been most afraid of being beaten—the brightest songs, when an evil day has forced us to lean on God. The soul fearing, and in dependence, difficulties fall before us. We might not be able to explain why success was there, but the secret is, the hands were lifted up. The Lord is always working out His own plans.

“Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.” Truth is never really ours but as the affections are kept in order by it. I might preach beautiful truth, and many delight in the truth, but the soul not having been in communion with God in the truth spoken, the loins would not be girt with it.

“And having on the breastplate of righteousness.” A person not having a clean conscience, Satan cows him in his walk; but if the conscience is good, he has on the “breastplate,” and so is not continually thinking of attacks there. If Satan accuse me, I say, Christ is my righteousness. But here it is Satan troubling me as to conscience. If I am not honest in my confessions before God, I am without the “breastplate.” If I have it, there is no need that I should keep looking at my own breast, I can go on in the confidence that I am hiding nothing from God, but am walking in all good conscience before Him. The Lord may shield us in the battle, but we cannot go on in conflict unless we have on this part of the “whole armour.” There is a resource, doubtless, in God’s grace, in all our failure; but the right place is to have a good conscience. And it is the place of liberty and strength.

“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” The gospel of peace is ours in Christ; but I must have the spirit of peace in my heart. Peace has been made for us that we may dwell in peace. It is the peace that “passeth all understanding” — “the peace of God” that is to keep our hearts and minds. There is no place so full of peace as heaven—no jar there: myriads of worshippers all in concord, while there are a thousand harmonies round the centre of God’s glory. The soul in communion with God will live in the spirit of peace. There is nothing more important, to meet the turmoil of the world, than getting into this spirit of peace. When the spirit of peace does not rule in the heart, how can the saint walk as having always peace? There may be uncompromising faithfulness in such a man, but he cannot walk as Jesus walked. Nothing keeps the soul in such peace as a settled confidence in God. Without this a man will be continually excited, in haste, and full of anxiety. If the peace of God keep your hearts, you will have the triumph of it; nothing can be heard that is distinctive from it, that does not perfectly harmonise with it. Uncompromising firmness becomes us, yet calmness; and nothing keeps the soul so calm as a sense of grace. This is a sign of power, and, moreover, connected with humbleness. All grace has come to us. A sense of nothingness, with the spirit of peace, gives a power to surmount all things.

“Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” Every “fiery dart” is quenched by confidence in God. A Christian need not be afraid to hold up his head in the day of battle, because God is with and for him. This is not shaken by whatever abominable thought Satan puts

into the mind. All is quenched by this confidence. “And take the helmet of salvation.” I hold up my head because I am safe. Salvation is mine.

Strength begins from within. We first have the loins girded about with truth, the breast covered with righteousness, the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, etc., and then we can take (our only offensive weapon) “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” There is nothing more dangerous than to use the word when it has not touched my conscience. I put myself into Satan’s hands if I go beyond what I have from God, what is in possession of my soul, and use it in ministry or privately. There is nothing more dangerous than the handling of the word apart from the guidance of the Spirit. To talk with saints on the things of God beyond what I hold in communion is most pernicious. There would be a great deal not said that is said, were we watchful as to this, and the word not so used in an unclean way. I know of nothing that more separates from God than truth spoken out of communion with God; there is uncommon danger in it.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints,” etc. The word “always “is not used in reference to some other things; prayer is the expression and exercise of dependence. If a person asks me a question, and I answer, without speaking to God about it, it will be more likely to lead from God than to God. Just as with Hezekiah (Isaiah 39) when the ambassadors came and he turned them to his treasures instead of to the Lord who had healed him. When a question or a difficulty comes, do we turn to God? We may have turned to God before, and the thing is

answered; and we ought to have that power of prayer that there would be no difficulty when any circumstance arises—this continual supplication; we ought to be furnished unto every good word and work. Thus it was with Jesus. He had prayed before, so when the cup came He was quite ready to drink it.

A wish or a desire expressed to God, in the confidence of a child to its father, is heard; but this is not necessarily prayer “in the Spirit.” When living really in the power of communion, we have that energy of supplication that looks for answers (1 John 3:21, 22; chap. 5:14, 15), and the apostle, here, speaks of one who is in communion. Thus should it be with us; we should be so walking in the liberty of Christ, as not to be tripped, or thrown out of communion, by the cares, lusts, and anxieties of this life, though it mav be an “evil day.”

Suppose you begin the day with a sweet spirit of prayer and confidence in God; in the course of the day, in this wicked world, you will find a thousand causes of agitation; but, if you are spiritually exercised, alive to see the things God is exercised in, everything will become a matter of prayer and intercession according to the mind of God. Thus humbleness and dependence should be marked on all a saint’s actions. Instead of being full of regrets at what we meet with, if walking with Christ, we shall see His interests in a brother or the church. What a blessed thing to carry everything to God! to take all to Him, instead of constantly murmuring over failure! This is our position—to have on the whole armour of God, and not to be tripped up of Satan. Unless right ourselves, we cannot make intercession for others. The words in verse 18 refer to a man who is walking in “the whole armour.”

The apostle could pray for everybody, and yet he the more needed the prayers of the saints, because he had more cares than others; v. 19, 20. He always wanted their prayers, as we see; v. 19. Walking in full affection himself, he reckoned upon people caring for him; walking as Paul did, this is taken for granted. Here too (v. 21, 22), and to the saints at Colosse, he speaks of having sent Tychicus, to declare his state— "that ye may know my affairs, and how I do." He takes their love for granted. We also, if walking in the love of the Spirit, can always count upon others being interested in our "affairs." In the world it would be pride to suppose others anxious about our concerns; but the saint knows, and counts on, the love of the Spirit in the saints.

To come back to the first great principle— "Be strong in the Lord," etc. Spite of Satan, and of all he may do to hinder, we have the privilege of individual dependence upon God. Everything may look dark, but the Lord tells us "to be strong." This is always accompanied with lowliness of heart. Come what will, when the Lord is rested on, we are strong. But our dependence must be simply, and singly, on God.

5 See "The last words of David," page 93 of this volume.

Thoughts On The Experience Of Abraham And Of Jacob

Editor's Note6

The experiences of the heart occupy a large place in the thoughts of Christians. It is nevertheless important always to judge them by the word of God. These experiences are the expression of the inward state of the heart, and of our relations with others, as well as of the sentiments which our conduct, in these same relations, produces in our hearts and in our consciences.

It is not necessary here to speak of the experience of an unconverted person, although such a one is nevertheless not without experiences. It is true, that he does not know God; but, in a certain sense, he enjoys His goodness in nature; his conscience can blame him—he can be weary of sin, and alarmed at the thought of judgment. He can even forget the latter in the enjoyment of his family and society in a life naturally amiable; but he can do no more.

Nevertheless there is a great variety in the experiences of men in whom the Spirit of God is working. This difference arises, on the one hand, from the relations in which we stand to God, and, on the other, from our conduct in the same relations. It is true that God has not put us under the law; nevertheless an awakened conscience is, as regards its relationship to God, either under the law or under grace. The Spirit of God, who has awakened it, has caused the light to enter, and produces there the feeling of its responsibility. I am under the law as long as I make my acceptance with God

to depend on my faithfulness to God, that is, on the fulfilment of my duties. If, on the other hand, the love of God and His work in Christ are, for my conscience, the only and perfect ground of my acceptance, then am I under grace. The Holy Spirit will not weaken the responsibility; but He will reveal to me that God has saved my soul, which was lost because my life did not answer this responsibility.

As long as the awakened soul remains under the law, it has sad experiences; it feels that it is guilty according to the law, and that it has no power to keep it. It is well aware that the law is good; but, in spite of all its efforts, it does not attain its object, which is obedience. The experiences of souls in such a state are the experiences of their sin—of their weakness and of the power of sin. Even supposing such a soul should not be as yet altogether brought to despair by the expectation of the just judgment of God, because it experiences in a slight degree the love of God, and because it hopes in the work of Christ, there will not be less uncertainty as to its relations with God; and this gives place to alternations of peace and trouble.

In the latter case, the soul has indeed been drawn by grace; but the conscience has not been purified, and the heart not set at liberty. These experiences are useful, in order to convince us of sin and weakness, and to destroy all confidence in ourselves. It is necessary that we should feel ourselves condemned before God, and that we should know, that henceforth all depends on His unmerited grace.

It is otherwise when our conscience is purged, and we have understood our position before God in Christ.

Condemned in the presence of God, we understand that God has loved us, and that He justifies us by the work of His Son; we understand that sin is taken away, and our conscience is made perfect. We have no longer conscience of sins before God, because He Himself has taken them away for ever by the blood of Christ, and that blood is always before His eyes; we know, that being united with Christ, who has fully glorified God in that which concerns our sins, we have been made the righteousness of God in Him. So the heart is free to enjoy His love in the presence of God.

Thenceforth we are under grace. Our relations with God depend thenceforth on God's nature, and the righteousness which Christ is become for us. Our relations with God do not depend on what we are before Him as responsible beings. Our experiences thenceforth ever return to this: that God is love, that Christ is our righteousness, and God is our Father. We have communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We enjoy all the privileges of that relation. Nevertheless the use which we make of our privileges affects that enjoyment. These relations remain constantly the same, as well as the perception which we have of them; but the enjoyment of what God is in that relation depends on our conduct in such a position.

The experiences are always founded on my relations with God. Am I sad? It is because the communion with God— communion which answers to my relations to Him —is interrupted. I feel that I do not enjoy the blessed communion to which I have attained, and it is this that causes my sadness; but this does not arise from uncertainty as to the communion itself. The flesh has no relations with God; and the flesh is ever in us. And "the

love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," Rom. 5:5. By the Spirit we have communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3); and we are called on to walk in the light, as God Himself is in the light; 1 John 1:7. Our communion with God depends on our walking in the light, although, when we have lost it, God can visit us by His grace, and restore communion. But God is faithful, and does not permit sin in His children. If they do not walk with Him in the light, He will cause them to pass through all the trials and all the conflicts necessary to bring them to the knowledge of themselves, that they may remain in the light, and that their communion may be true and pure.

It is true that these trials and conflicts do not affect our relations with God, because they depend on what God is in Christ, according to His grace and righteousness; but the suspension of communion with God, a suspension which puts us outside of the enjoyment of the light, brings us into ail kinds of conflicts, and painful and humbling experiences of what our own heart really is. God Himself also employs correction to humble us and break our will. Not only is the actual fall into sin an opportunity for the dealing of God with our souls, but all that is hard and rebellious in our souls also affords an opportunity for it. The consequence of these truths is, that the experiences of a soul that walks with God are far more simple than the experiences of an unfaithful soul; and, nevertheless, the knowledge of God and of the heart of man will be far deeper in the former case. As long as we walk in communion with Him, we walk in the light; and we have in His presence the continual sense of His fatherly love. Nevertheless this presence acts

upon our soul to manifest all that is not in harmony with the light. The judgment of ourselves takes place in the presence of God, in the sense of His love, and in connection with that love. Sin has the character of everything which is not light; and is judged, not only because sin cannot agree with holiness, but also because it does not agree with the love of God.

With hearts purified by the love of God, and strengthened by communion with Him, the grace which acts thus in us takes the place of sin which has been judged, and thenceforth our walk in the world is the effect of the communion of God in our hearts. We carry God, so to speak, through the world in our hearts filled with His love, and living in the power of the life of Christ, that which Satan offers does not tempts us. Our worldly trials become a motive to obedience and not to sin. The presence of God in our hearts preserves us in our relations with men. Thenceforth we experience proofs of our corruption in the presence of God, and in communion with Him. It is thus we judge sin in ourselves, and sin thus judged does not appear in our walk. But if we do not walk in fellowship with God, if sin is not thus judged, we walk more or less in the world with a rebellious will and lusts unjudged. The action of our self-will makes us uneasy, because we are not satisfied. Are we satisfied? Then God is forgotten. Satan presents temptations which answer to unjudged lusts; then the corruption of the heart manifests itself by a fall and by our relations with Satan, which take the place of our relations with God. Such a knowledge of the corruption of the heart will be never so deep, never so clear, never so true, as that which we shall have obtained in the presence of God by the light itself. We

shall know sin by sin, by a bad conscience, instead of knowing it by the light of God Himself. We shall be humbled, instead of being humble. The faithfulness of God will restore the soul; but the continued power and growing light of His communion will not be the same. It is true we shall experience His patience and His goodness; but we shall not know God in the same way as when walking faithfully in communion with Him. It is true, God glorifies Himself by His ways with such a soul, because all things concur to His eternal glory; but the knowledge of God grows by our communion with Him.

The life of Abraham and that of Jacob come in the way of interesting examples, in support of what we have been saying. It is true that neither the law, nor the fulness of grace, had been as yet revealed. Nevertheless, as we see in Hebrews n, the principles of the life of faith in the promises of God were in general the same.

“In many things we offend all.” Abraham himself failed in faith on some occasions; but, in general, his life was a walk of faith with God. This is the reason why his experiences are of another nature, far more intimate with God, and more simple, than those of Jacob. His history is short, and not rich in incidents; while the communications of God to this patriarch are numerous and frequent. In his history there is much about God, and little about man. With one single exception Abraham always remained in the land of promise. He was indeed a stranger and pilgrim, because the Canaanites dwelt there (Gen. 12:6), but he was in relation with God, and walked before Him.

At first when God had called him, he had not fully answered this call. It is true he left indeed his country

and kindred, but not his father's house, and so he did not arrive in Canaan. It is true, he had given up a great deal; he had gone from Ur in Chaldea, but he came no farther than Charran and rested there; chap, 11:31, 32. So it is with the heart that has not learned that it belongs entirely to God. It is only in conformity with the call of God that we can enter into the position of the promise.

After the death of his father Terah, Abraham started at the command of God; and they set out to come into the land of Canaan, and they entered into it; chap. 12:5. Here we have the position of the heavenly people. Placed, by the grace and power of God, in a heavenly position, of which Canaan is a figure, they dwell there; they have everything in promise, but nothing as yet in possession. The Lord revealed Himself to Abraham in calling him; He reveals Himself anew to him in the place which he now knew, and which he was going to possess: "I will give this land to thy posterity," v. 7. Such is in general our confidence in God, that we shall possess really in future that which we know now as strangers.

"And Abraham built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him," v. 7. He serves God and enjoys communion with Him. Thence he goes into another place and there pitches his tent; he builds anew an altar to the Lord, and calls on the name of Jehovah; v. 8. He is a pilgrim in the land of promise; and that is his entire history. We dwell in the heavenly places, we enjoy them by faith; and we have communion with God who brought us thither. Abraham's tent and altar in this place give a character to his whole history, and all the experiences of faith consist in that.

His unbelief brings him into Egypt; v. 10-21. There he had no altar. An Egyptian servant-maid becomes afterwards the occasion of his fall, and a source of trouble to him. She is, as we learn in Galatians 4:24, 25, a type of the law; for the law and the flesh are always in relationship with each other. The grace of God brings Abraham back; but he does not regain an altar till he has returned to the place where he first pitched his tent, and to the altar which he had built before; there he has communion afresh with God; chap. 13:3, 4.

The promises of God are the portion of Abraham. He lets Lot take what he pleases: “Is not the whole land before thee? Separate from me, I pray thee. If thou choosest the left, I will take the right; and if thou take the right, I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw the whole plain of Jordan, which, before the Lord had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, was watered throughout until one comes to Zoar, like the garden of the Lord, and like the land of Egypt. And Lot chose for himself the whole plain of Jordan,” v. 9-11. Lot is the type of a worldly believer. He takes that which for the moment appears the better part, and chooses the place over which the judgment of God is suspended. Abraham had given up everything according to the flesh, and God shews him the whole extent of the promise. He gives him a visible proof of that which he has given him; and confirms it to him for ever; v. 14-18. Lot, the worldly believer, is overcome by the princes of the world. Abraham delivers him. With the servants of his house he overcomes the power of the enemy; chap. 14:1-21. He will receive nothing of the world. He says to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted up my hand to the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will

not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich," chap. 14:22, 23.

Afterwards God reveals Himself to Abraham as his buckler and great reward. He promises him a posterity at a time when his body was now dead. Justified by faith, he receives the confirmation of the promises of God, who binds Himself by a sacrifice, type of the sacrifice of Christ. Then the inheritance is shewn him in its details; chap. 15.

Following the counsels of the flesh, Abraham desires for a moment the fulfilment of the promise by the law; that is to say, by Hagar. But thus he only learns that it is impossible that the child of the law should inherit with the child of promise; chap. 16. Then God reveals Himself anew as God Almighty. He tells him that he shall be the father of many nations, and that God will be his God for ever; chap. 17:1-14. The posterity according to the promise is promised again; chap. 17:15-19.

After that, God once more visits Abraham, and gives him positive promise respecting the approaching birth of his son; chap. 18:9-15. He looks upon him as His friend, saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? "chap. 18:17. He communicates to him His thoughts concerning the world, and Abraham converses with Him in perfect peace and familiarity. He prays for those who had forgotten the Lord; chap. 18:23-33. It was necessary that Abraham should again experience, in the case of Ishmael, that the law produces sadness and anguish; and at the court of Abimelech he learnt to know that when unbelief is in action, it only produces troubles and

sorrows. But God, in His faithfulness, watches over him, as well as over the mother of the posterity.

Afterwards Abraham was tried in the highest degree, till he had to give up everything according to the flesh, and even the promises. But the promises in a Christ raised in figure are confirmed to Christ Himself, and in Him to all the spiritual posterity of Abraham; chap. 22:15-19; compare Gal. 3:16-18.

Abraham then has learned by a fall that neither the law nor the promise is of any avail for the flesh; nevertheless, in general, his peculiar experiences consisted in pilgrimage and adoration, all the time he continued in the promised land. We have now remarked that his life is characterised by a tent and an altar. The whole experience, the whole life of the faithful Abraham, consists almost entirely of worship, intercession, and revelations from God; so that he learned to comprehend these latter with increasing clearness and accuracy. He passed his time in the place to which God had called him. The revelations of God were for him, rich, sweet, and admirable; his knowledge of God intimate and deep; his personal experiences happy and simple; for he walked with God, who had revealed Himself to him, in grace.

Now let us also examine a little more closely the life and history of Jacob. He was the inheritor of the same promise, and, as a believer, he valued it; but he did not trust in God alone. He did not walk, like Abraham, in daily fellowship with the Lord, and waiting upon the Lord. It is true he received the promise, but his experiences were very different from those of Abraham. Although at the end of his life he could say, “The angel

which redeemed me from all evil" (Gen. 48:16), he nevertheless was constrained to add, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage," chap. 47:9. The variety of his experience is a proof of unfaithfulness.

In compliance with his mother's advice, he employed profane means to obtain his father's blessing; and was obliged, through fear of his deceived but profane brother, to leave the land of promise; chaps. 27 and 28. Now his position is altogether changed; his unbelief has driven him out of the land of promise. His pilgrimage is not, like that of Abraham, in the land, but outside of it. It is true, God watches over him, waits on him, and preserves him; but he does not walk with God. He has no altar till his return, after a course of painful experiences; chap. 33:20. He had no full communion with God till he returned to the place where he had last enjoyed the revelation of God, and where he had been strengthened by His promises. For one-and-twenty years he had to do with men who cheated and oppressed him, while God preserved him in secret; but he could not possibly have an altar outside the land of promise.

We also worship God, and we have communion with God, while we dwell in spirit in heavenly places, there where God Himself has given us our proper place. But if we get outside of it, we can have no fellowship with Him, although He knows how to keep us by His grace and faithfulness.

At the end of twenty-one years God orders Jacob to return. He must flee far from his father-in-law like a guilty fugitive. It is impossible to be pure from the world if we have lost heavenly communion with God; and it is difficult not to carry away something that belongs to the world, if we abandon that communion. But God is faithful. From that moment a course of experiences begins for Jacob (as they are generally called), but which nevertheless are nothing more than the effects of his getting away from God.

Delivered from Laban, Jacob pursues his journey towards Canaan; and God, to comfort and fortify him, sends an army of His angels to meet him; chap. 32:1. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this encouragement from God, unbelief, which deliverance from danger does not destroy, renews Jacob's fear in the presence of his brother Esau. One does not get rid of the difficulties of the path of faith by trying to avoid them; one must surmount them by the power of God. Jacob had brought these difficulties upon himself, because he had not trusted in God. The host of God was forgotten; and the army of Esau, who no longer cherished in his heart hatred against his brother, frightened the feeble Jacob; chap. 32:7. He could then employ all kinds of means to appease the presumed and dreaded anger of his brother. He causes flock after flock to pass; and this does more to shew the state of the heart of Jacob than to change that of Esau. Nevertheless Jacob thinks of God; he reminds Him that He told him he ought to return; he implores Him to save him from the hands of his brother; he thinks of the state in which he left the country, and acknowledges that God had given him all his possessions; chap. 32:9-11. But his prayer discovers an

ungrounded fear. He reminds God of His promises, as if it were possible that He had forgotten them. It is true there is faith in it, but the effect of unbelief produces a wild and confused picture. The timid Jacob has not only sent forward his flocks to appease Esau (chap. 32:13-20), but he sends his whole family across the brook, and remains behind alone; v. 22, 24. His heart is filled with anxieties. But God, who guides all, awaits him precisely there. Although He had not permitted Esau to touch so much as a hair of Jacob's head, He nevertheless had Himself to judge him, and bring him into the fight of His presence; for Jacob could in no other way enjoy the land of promise with God. God wrestles with him in the darkness till daybreak; v. 24. It is not here Jacob wrestling with God of his own accord; but it is God wrestling against him.

He could not bless him simply, like Abraham; he must first correct the unbelief of his heart. Jacob must experience the effects of his conduct; he must even suffer, because God will bless him. Nevertheless, the love of God is acting in all this. He gives strength to Jacob during the conflict in which he must engage to obtain the blessings, to persevere in waiting for them. He will nevertheless have to retain a lasting proof of his weakness and previous unfaithfulness. His hip-joint had been put out while God wrestled with him; v. 25. And not only that, but God also refuses to reveal His name to him unreservedly. He blesses Jacob. He gives him a name in memorial of his fight of faith, but He does not reveal Himself. How great is the difference here between Jacob and Abraham! God reveals His name to the latter without being asked to do so, that Abraham may know Him fully; for Abraham generally walked with Him in the

power of this revelation. He had no conflict with God; and, far from having to fear kinsfolk, he overcame the power of the kings of this world. He is there as a prince among the inhabitants of the land. God frequently converses with him; and, instead of wrestling with Him to obtain a blessing for himself, Abraham intercedes for others. He sees the judgment of the world from the height where he was in communion with God. Let us return to the history of Jacob, Notwithstanding all, his fear never leaves him. Blessed by God by means of his conflict, he still trembles before his brother Esau. He divides his children and wives according to the measuring of his affection, so that those whom he most loved were at the greatest distance from Esau. Only then does he undertake to go to meet his brother. But nevertheless he deceives him again. He evades the offer of an escort which Esau makes him, and promises to follow him a little more gently to his residence near Seir; chap. 33:14. But Jacob went to Succoth; v. 17.

Now Israel (Jacob) is in the country; nevertheless, his heart having been long accustomed to the condition of a traveller without God, he knows not how to become a pilgrim with God. He buys a field near Shechem, and settles himself in a place where Abraham was only a stranger, and where, knowing the will of God, he had not possessed a spot of ground whereon to set his foot; v. 19. It is at Shechem for the first time, and after having returned into the land, that he builds an altar; the name of the altar recalls the blessing of Israel, but not the name of the God of the promises. He calls the altar “God, the God of Israel,” chap. 33:20. Thankfulness, it is true, recognises the blessing which Jacob has received; but the God who blessed him is not yet revealed.

We now find corruption and violence in his family; chap. 34. The wrath of his sons, cruel and void of the fear of God, brings him out of his false rest, which was not founded on God; but again the faithfulness of God preserves him. Hitherto Jacob had not thought of the place where God Himself had made him the promise, from the time of his departure, and where Jacob had promised to worship when he should have returned by the help of God. God Himself sends him there now, and says to him, “Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God who appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother,” chap. 35:1. God, who had guarded, guided, chastened him, had prepared him to come into communion with Him. But first it was necessary that he should leave his false home, where God was not. He must lodge at Bethel (the house of God), and in that very place build an altar to God who had first revealed Himself to him. We here see the instantaneous effect of the presence of God with Jacob, a presence which he had not yet learned to know, in spite of all his experiences up to that moment. The thought of that presence immediately recalls to his mind the false gods which were still among his furniture.

These false gods were the effect of his connection with the world; and Rachel, from fear of Laban, had hid them under the camels’ furniture. Jacob knew well that they were there; nevertheless he said to his family and to all those who were with him, “Put away the strange gods that are among you and be clean, and change your garments, and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and who was with me in the way which I went. And they gave Jacob all the strange gods

which were in their hand, and all their earrings that were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak that was by Shechem," chap. 35:2, 4. The thought of the presence of God made him remember the false gods; it awakens in his soul the conviction that the gods, the objects of the adoration of this world, can never be kept together with a faithful God. Nothing else can awaken this conviction. No possible experiences can ever have the effect which the presence of God produces on a soul. Such experiences are useful to humble us, they are a means of stripping us of ourselves. Nevertheless it is only the presence of God as light which can cause us to condemn ourselves, and gives us power to purify ourselves from our deepest and well-known though hidden idols. Abraham had nothing to do either with Jacob's idols or Jacob's experiences.

The fear of God reigned over the enemies of Jacob, so that they did not follow him, notwithstanding the murderous violence of his sons; chap. 35:5. Now God could reveal Himself to Jacob; and although he remained lame, all went on as if he had not before passed through any experience. Jacob had come to Bethel, from whence he had started. There he built an altar to the God who had made him the promises, and who had always been faithful to him. The name of his altar no longer reminds us of Jacob blessed, but of Him who blesses, and of His house. It is not called the altar of God, the God of Israel, but the altar of the God of Bethel, that is to say of the house of God; chap. 35:7. God at this time speaks with Jacob, without saying anything at all of his experiences. These had been necessary to chasten Jacob, and empty him of himself, because he had been unfaithful. God Himself appeared to him now without being entreated.

We read in verse 9, God appeared again to Jacob when he came from Padan-Aram, and blessed him. He gave him the name of Israel, as if He had not given it him before, and reveals to him His name without Jacob having asked it of Him. He converses with him as formerly with Abraham. He renews the promises, and confirms them to him—at least, those which have reference to Israel; and, after having ended His communication with him, God went up from him, for He had visited him; Gen. 35:13.

Jacob was then returned, after a course of experiences, to the place where he could have communion with God—to a position in which, by the grace of God, Abraham had almost always kept himself. Jacob is a warning to us, but Abraham is an example. The first has, it is true, found the Lord again by His grace; but he has not had the many and blessed experiences of the other, and does not pray for others. The highest point of attainment with him is Abraham's starting point, even the home of his soul. With the exception of a few falls, this was the habitual state of Abraham, the state in which he lived. Abraham "died in a good old age, an old man, and full of days, and was gathered to his people." But Jacob said, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage," Gen. 25:8; chap. 47:9. He ended his life in Egypt. The experiences of Jacob are the experiences of what the hearts of men are. The experiences of Abraham are the experiences of the heart of God.

We have described three kinds of experiences:1, Those which take place under the law, the position of a believer not known; or, when without being ignorant of

it, he is there, having his heart all the time under the law. 2, The experiences which one had of his own heart, from the time that one walks far from that position where God reveals Himself to cherish and keep up this communion. 3, The simple and blessed experiences which one has in walking with God, in the place where God has set us, to enjoy communion with Him, in lowliness and thankfulness. These last are experiences of the heart of God, which bring us into the knowledge of His counsels, and of the faithful love which is contained in them. They consist in a close communion with God Himself; the others are, as it has been said, the painful experiences of the heart of man, among which the highest measure—and also precious for us—is, that God remains faithful in the midst of our unfaithfulness, and that He is patient towards our folly, by the which we put ourselves at a distance from His presence.

Our privilege is to walk like Abraham; our refuge when we are unfaithful (for God is faithful who does not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear) is that God remains faithful, and draws us out of all danger to the end. May God give us grace to dwell near to Him, to walk with Him, that our experiences may have for their end the growing knowledge of His love and of His nature; Col. 1:9-12.

6 The original was in German.

The Failure Of The Sons Of Aaron

Leviticus 10

One of the blessed places in which we are set, as children of God, is that of being made “priests “unto Him. But whilst we are apt, and justly so, to consider this a position of highest privilege, we too often forget, practically, that it is one of constant service. Set in blessed nearness unto God, yet (and by that very nearness) the priests in Israel became mere servants of all the people. Jesus, though “made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (a priest and king), is now a “minister of the sanctuary,” after the pattern of the priestly service of Aaron; and we, “priests and kings unto God,” etc., are set in the place of service, as the “sons of Aaron.”7 We trace all through the Scriptures the record of the failure of man. In every circumstance wherein he has been set, man has failed. And yet (as we have often heard) all this failure is seen but in the end to redound to the glory of God— to the praise of His grace. How full of blessing and goodness is this! It meets the pride of our hearts, and their natural tendency (that which is in every one of us) to self-dependence. Adam, Noah, Israel in every form, teaches this lesson—the giving of the law, priesthood, prophets, kings, the whole history of the wilderness and of the land, the same. Failure is ever the character of the ways of man; and the chapter before us presents it in most striking as well as touching circumstances. The “sons of Aaron” were set in the place of grace, and there in the place of grace they failed.

The law had in itself no aspect of grace—this of course. Let me take law in its highest sense, as that which even concerns angels—unfallen, perfect beings—what does it teach? What God requires—what ought to be. “They do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.” And thus also the ten words were the distinct demand, on the part of God, of righteousness from man, of what man ought to be towards Him and before Him—“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.” Nay, more; the law supposed sin—was adapted to those who had a tendency to sin; but the foundation and centre of all our blessings, what God is towards man in love and grace, was never brought out at all. Thus law (properly so) utterly fails in bringing us to God.

But there were accompaniments to the law—sacrifices, which had the character of grace, because they were on behalf of transgressors. And here, properly speaking, priesthood found its place. See Hebrews 5. The priest was “ordained for men to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin.” That is grace—God not requiring goodness, but providing for sinners.

Here then we find the failure of the “sons of Aaron” in this practical development of grace, and man’s services in grace.

But first let us look a little at another part of priestly service —I mean worship. All that is properly worship, while there is sacrifice for sin, yet, strictly speaking, is not founded upon the presentation of the “sin-offering.” As redeemed, we cannot draw nigh to worship without it; it is the door of entrance, indeed, but not the proper

character of our worship. This assumes the “sweet savour” of the “burnt-offering”— the coming up to God not only in the value of the blood, but in our acceptance in Jesus, as having all the positive savour of what He was and did unto God—blessed thought!

There is this great principle in all worship: death must come in between us and God. See the case of Cain and Abel. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground upon which the curse rested—that which every natural man brings to God. His worship cost more of the “sweat of his brow,” the judicial toil of the curse consequent on sin, than that of Abel; but there was no faith in it, no recognition of the ground of his own standing before God, or of God’s judgment, mercy, and patience. The offering of Cain (as of every natural man) is the witness of the most perfect insensibility of heart as to what he was before God. All that we can offer of our natural hearts is “the sacrifice of fools.” The contrary was the case with Abel: his “more excellent sacrifice” consisted in this—it confessed that death must come in between the soul and God. And so it ever must; there can be no worship without it: in all circumstances death must come in between us and God.

Still there are two very distinct characters in death, as the wages of sin, and for God. While it is the witness of man’s sin, yet because of the death of the Lord Jesus death is now one of our servants. All things are ours, whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are ours. Death is for us now as it was against us before, because Christ has tasted death. “Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death,

that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage," Heb. 2:14, 15. It was "by the grace of God" Christ tasted death. In His death we see the grace of God, though it was on account of sin. All that was against us is gone. The Lord Jesus Christ turns everything He touches into blessing. "Out of the eater cometh forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness." If I am able to contemplate death in its mightiest power, the death of Jesus, I see in it the power of grace.

And here it is that I find the proper character of the savour of worship, in the "burnt-offering." The blessedness of the offering of Jesus was in the perfectness of His will, but the entireness of self-sacrifice to God— "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father," John 10:17, 18. He was not only the spotless victim, but one able to give Himself to God. "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 man; 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. Again, "Lo I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heart," Ps. 40:7, 8; Heb. 10:7. So we get not only the grace of God in the gift of Jesus, but that Jesus, "through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God," Heb. 9:14.

Will, which in us is sin, becomes in the offering up of Himself, obedience—in every phase was perfectness. Perfect in all His ways, in all His life, in self-consecration to God; but this perfect thing itself He offered up to God in perfect obedience: “not my will, but thine, be done.” There was the perfection of glorifying God in it. Just as the purpose of self-will in the first Adam, who sought to glorify himself, brought in death, so that of the will to glorify God in the Lord Jesus Christ, through death brought in life to us. The divine glory was gone, so far as man was concerned; he had insulted the character and majesty of God, had listened to the lie of Satan against God (for he denied that truth and goodness were in God), he had taken Satan for his friend: but the Lord Jesus Christ, in thus offering up Himself, glorified God in all. And so when Judas had gone out, He says, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him,” John 13:34. God found rest there.

God was glorified. Was He true in saying that the “wages of sin is death? “Satan had said “ye shall not surely die”: see Jesus. Was He true in His love for man? This Satan had questioned: Jesus died for him. Did Satan tempt man, and say, “then shall ye be as gods?” God gave His Son, and conformity to His image. God was vindicated thus against man, though for man.

When the Lord Jesus Christ “through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God,” God found His rest there. It is no matter where I find my rest, if I am not seeking rest where God has found His. God has found it in Jesus (He can look for or to nothing else, in one sense); and we can rest there also. Here we have the ground of worship, and worship itself: it assumes the

proper savour of all that Christ was and did for us, and thus has the character of the “burnt-offering.”

In another character—as the “sin-offering”—sin was laid upon Him, “He was made sin for us,” 2 Cor. 5:21. This was not” an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Jehovah,” but was burnt without the camp as an unclean thing; Lev. 4. When the offerings themselves are brought out in Leviticus, the burnt-offering, meat-offering, and peace-offering are mentioned first, and then the sin-offering; but in application, when the individual worshipper is treated of, he presented his sin-offering first, then his burnt-offering, etc., because he could not worship whilst sin was against him, but had to approach by the efficacy of that which took it away. Though God meets us in our sins by the blood of Christ, yet when we speak of worship we speak of Him in His own savour before God. We come in all the savour of Christ’s sacrifice. Sin is gone out of the place, and we stand in the value, the intrinsic value, of Christ.

The burnt offering was a “sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Jehovah,” Lev. i:9. The more it was searched by the fire, the more its sweetness came out before God. So was it in Christ. The coming down of the fire of the holiness of God, trying and searching all the inwards of everything in Him, only brought out a “sweet savour “unto God. This too is our acceptance; it is in this value that we ascend up to God; and being there, we have communion of worship and fellowship before Him. In the sacrifices God had His food, the priest his share, and the rest ate of them also. All our feasting upon Christ is in this value.

It was from the “altar of burnt-offering” that coals were taken to kindle the incense that went up before God. “Strange fire” not arising from this source was inadmissible. All our worship, our singing a hymn together, for instance, must have this character—the savour of Christ; God accepts it as such, though full of failure. Everything must be “salted with fire”; if it does not go up through fire, it cannot stand; apart from it there is only condemnation and judgment—the character of the sin of Nadab and Abihu. The fire tries every man’s work; and if judgment has already done its work on Jesus, we have nothing but the savour of Jesus to be in before God. This is the real value of our place before the Lord. In this is our joy. It is the place of grace.

But then it was here that the “sons of Aaron” failed. “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire thereon, and put incense therein, and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which he commanded them not,” v. 1. There was the separation of service from the power of its acceptance, and thus failure in the place of grace; failure, not on God’s part, but on man’s. Man has failed under law, that might be expected; but, when brought near to God in grace, there also has he failed. The sin of Nadab and Abihu (in this the awful type of the professing church) was sin against the very grace of God, want of respect in the sense of their position, of reverence of God. Our place, though that of perfectness of joy, is ever that of reverence; Heb. 12:28, 29.

But how is the sin met? As must needs be, in judgment—judgment coming forth from the very place of grace: “there went out fire from before Jehovah, and they died before Jehovah,” v. 2. It is a terrible character the Lord

puts on here! The “strange fire “met in result by holiness, the true fire of God’s judgment— “they died before Jehovah.” Awful thought! He was found to be a God of judgment, in the very place of blessing and of grace. And thus must it ever be with that which takes falsely a place “before Jehovah”; for after all, though it is a place of grace, it is still one of judgment; “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me.” We have ever to judge ourselves, that we be not judged of God; 1 Cor. 11:31.

We read, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,” 1 Pet. 1:15-17. The Lord always judges according to the place into which we are brought, according to the position in which we stand. And so do we of others, in some sort. For instance, I judge of those who are within my house differently from what I do of those without; I say, not to a stranger, but to one brought into my house, You must have clean habits to live here. God is dealing with us on the ground of grace, yet of holiness; for holiness is with us as much a part of grace as any other blessing. “Be ye holy, for I am holy” is the expression of intimacy, and comes not merely in the way of command. Grace must make us holy, “partakers of his holiness.” See Hebrews 12. It is not God requiring man’s holiness, but making us partakers of His. What could we wish more? Love does it, and we are made partakers of that which separates God from all that is inconsistent with Himself— holiness, not mere innocence. Innocence is the ignorance of good

and evil; you would not say that God was innocent, but holy. He makes us “partakers of his holiness.” It is “his holiness” —the knowledge of evil as He knows it, and ability to rise above it. The holiness is as much a part of the grace, as the love that does it.

They died. “And Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that Jehovah spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace,” v. 3. There was silence as to the place of intercession. “There is a sin unto death”: the church has to be silent; 1 John 5:16. God has taken the cause into His own hands, He has acted in His holy place, and all that man can do is to hold his peace. But this is not all. The Lord takes occasion by this failure, to bring out what is our position “before him” day by day, and to shew forth yet other failure.

“And Jehovah spake unto Aaron”—to Aaron, because about that which became the priests, those who go in “before Jehovah.”8 We have instructions from Christ, as the Priest, as well as the Lawgiver. There are things which refer to the comeliness of the saints, and not to mere righteousness— things which are known by the Spirit to be comely to us as priests. We read in Hebrews 5 that those are priests who are “called of God, as was Aaron,” and that “Christ glorified not himself to be made an High Priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” So, though in an altogether inferior sense, we are priests as born of God, we become priests. That which is here brought before us is not merely precept; it is priestly instruction as to the manner of our approach to God; and that which

understands and estimates it is the new nature in which we are born of God.

“And Jehovah spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations; and that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah has spoken unto them by the hand of Moses,” v. 8-n. “Wine” and “strong drink”—all that excites the flesh, that does not belong to the cleanness of spiritual apprehension and judgment becoming those who go into the sanctuary, must be put away.

I believe we are often hindered going into God’s presence by this “drinking of wine.” The moment there is that which acts on the flesh and excites nature, the going to find pleasure and joy in things harmless even in themselves, no matter what (nature may take up anything), there is “wine” and “strong drink,” that which would put us out of the place of spiritual discernment; and it is inadmissible.

There are ten thousand things which may thus excite, eloquence for instance. If excited by eloquence, this would hinder the enjoyment of truth: the same truth, were it presented without it, and thus that which is of Christ, would pall on the taste. Eloquence is not in itself a wrong thing, and yet Paul says, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in

weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

There is a vast deal connected with the things of God that is not like this; a vast deal which after all is "wine" and "strong drink," and it unfits for the sanctuary. Whatever has not the real, calm, spiritual joy fit for the presence of God is so. Look at it—we see it connected with all the forms of false worship. Again, thought as to the beauty and elegance of the edifice where we meet for worship, etc., has the same character; it acts on nature, and whatever does this cannot be fit for the presence of God—cannot be carried into His sanctuary. So of all things around which hinder the power of spiritual discernment, though not in themselves wrong. We might be in a lovely place and not think of it; then it is not "strong drink."

The object of this instruction is not merely as to our acting rightly. The condition of mind which gives the capacity of judging "between unclean and clean," depends on the absence of these things—the capacity of learning, through fellowship with God in the sanctuary, to "put difference between holy and unholy." So the apostle prays for the saints at Colosse, that they might be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," etc. So, too, for the Philippians, that they might have such a knowledge of the will of God, "that ye may approve things that are excellent [try the things that differ]; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ":

without a single stumble all the way along until the coming of the Lord. He supposes there might be such intimacy of acquaintance with the mind of God, that they would not.

We can never give the least justification to sin and say, The flesh is in us, and we could not help it; for “there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it.” The theory of the Christian is this—the flesh should never be discovered but in the presence of God, where it is always in the presence of grace and of holiness too. This is the true power of our walk. It is not any particular measure of attainment; it is simply a man walking according to his communion, who never gets into the weakness of the flesh, for the flesh is known only before God, and not before Satan. When I learn the flesh thus, I drink into the opposite of it, the grace of God, and so go forth in the strength of what is in God, and not in the shame and weakness of what is in myself.

Thus it is, that, in estrangement from all that acts upon the flesh, and near God, I learn in the sanctuary His mind, and am able to “put difference between holy and unholy, unclean and clean.” Then also I can teach others and say, That is the mind of the Lord about such and such a thing; as it is said here, “teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.” But have we not often found an incapacity to judge according to the mind of God, where there was no failure in precept—a spiritual incompetency? Alas! my friends, we have been content

to “drink wine, and strong drink,” and thus our spiritual faculties have become darkened.

There is another thing to notice. The “sons of Aaron” were to eat of the “meat-offering” and the “peace-offering,” v. 12-15. See the fellowship here. The inward parts were fed upon by God (of the “peace-offering,” it was “the food of the offering made by fire unto Jehovah”). Aaron and his sons had their part, and so also the particular worshipper. I cannot then separate myself from God herein, because I cannot separate myself from God’s delight in Christ, nor from the whole family of God who have all their portion. There is no proper worship that does not take in God, Christ, and the whole family of Aaron—the church: it is a common feast, if true. So in Ephesians 3, “that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” How can I “comprehend with all saints” if I leave out any? I cannot separate from them without diminishing my own sense of the fulness of the love of Christ and of God. If I leave out one, he is Christ’s joy. And here we fail.

Again: there is, in a certain sense, a priestly way in which we have to bear the sins and sorrows of our brethren; not, of course, as to atonement (that was Christ’s alone; the blood carried inside was Christ’s alone), but still there is a true sense in which we have to bear them. And in this, I believe above everything else, we fail. It is not only that Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire: Eleazar and Ithamar were not like them, and yet their failure is recorded. “And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin-offering, and behold it was

burnt: and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron, which were left alive, saying, Wherefore have ye not eaten of the sin-offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God has given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before Jehovah? Behold, the blood of it was not brought in within the holy place, ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded," v. 16-18. The rule as to the sin-offering was this: if the blood was carried inside, to be sprinkled before Jehovah, the body was carried without the camp to be burnt; but in the sin-offering for offences, the priest was to eat it; and in this the "sons of Aaron "had a share.

We get the pattern for the exercise of grace in the saints as to the failure and sins of their brethren, in John 13: "If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Where there is defilement seen in a brother, there should ever be this washing by us; but it is impossible that there can, unless in spirit we bear before the Lord all the burden of the fault and sin we desire to confess (washing the feet is not atonement); and here we all fail—in the use of this priestly service.

Suppose I were really walking in the power of the place in which I am set, if I see sin in my brother, and go to pray for him, I find him identified with Christ as represented to the world: the garment of Christ is soiled, the honour of Christ is affected, the joy of Christ is hindered, all is spoiled in that sense, communion with Christ is lost. It is a terrible thing to see the saints of God dishonour Christ thus! Well, now, it is to bear the misery and the sorrow of all this, as though I had been in the sin myself. Love gets into the place of the sinner,

and his sin becomes the occasion of the outgoings of the heart in intercession to God—of the working of love.

Suppose a child in agony—the mother sees it thus distressed, convulsed by pain; and, though she herself has no pain of body, she suffers far more than it in pain of mind, in agony of heart. Thus should it be with us, in feeling with the saints, when writhing under false doctrine or unworthiness of walk. All is borne by Jesus, but then we should identify ourselves with Jesus in dealing about the sin—in feeding on the "sin-offering." See Daniel, in his confession. Did he say Israel has sinned? No, but "we have sinned"; "to us belongeth confusion of faces"; "we have rebelled." And this is our place.

When Moses charges Eleazar and Ithamar with the sin, Aaron comes in (v. 19) and answers for them; he lays it all upon himself. And so Christ for us: He makes Himself responsible for it all. It was, however, their privilege to have eaten of the "sin-offering," as it is ours: we are given this portion. God, in the riches of His grace, not only blesses us, but uses us: we are fellow-workers under Him. Paul plants, Apollos waters, God gives the increase; whilst it is God who has done it all. If a man was converted, whose joy was it? "Ye are our joy." It was Paul's joy. Paul had not redeemed them, but he had the joy of love.

In giving us this service of love we have His Spirit in us, and so the joy of love is ours. But it is not merely that we should go out and preach the gospel to sinners (preaching the gospel answers to the ministry of apostleship, whilst teaching and admonishing the saints answers to that of priesthood); prayer for a brother is

ministry of love in priesthood. If it be a matter of intercession, we ought to bear all the iniquity of it on our own hearts before the Lord. Thus the very sin itself becomes the occasion of the outflowing of love, and not of judgment.

But is it not true that we have failed? Whilst the outward professing church has offered strange fire “before the Lord,” have we known how to “eat the sin-offering” for our brethren? Have we not been charging them with the offence in righteousness, laying it down to them as under law, instead of eating the sin-offering in the holy place?

Grief should not hinder our acting thus in priestly service before the Lord; but let us take care also that the joy of nature does not, the “wine” and “strong drink.” Again, I say, have we not shrunk from bearing the iniquity of our brethren in intercession before the Lord, from eating the sin-offering in the holy place? How little do the faults of a dear brother pain us as our own! Have we really pleaded, as feeling the evil, in the intercession of grace? How seldom do we thus deal with it, standing as it were in the gap! There is a vast deal of failure in all of us as to this—abundant failure! There is not that sense among us of the identity of Christ with His saints, which would put us thus in the place of intercession.

But the voice of Aaron is lifted up (v. 19) and it prevails; Moses, the commander and requirer, is “content,” v. 20. So, in hearing the voice of our Aaron, when lifted up on our behalf, God is “content.” And here is our comfort under the sense of it all.

Peace is heard again. But if it be so, the sense of that should not make us think lightly about the sins of our brethren.

7 We find in this part of scripture the high priest and his sons, or “Aaron and his sons,” continually presented to us as a type of the church. Sometimes, however, they are very distinctly separated, as, for instance, in their consecration; Lev. 8. Aaron is anointed without blood having been sprinkled upon him—they with blood. This shews very definitely the perfectness of Christ in His own Person to receive the fulness of the Holy Ghost: we can only have it by virtue of His perfectness and blood-shedding for us. I look at Aaron as a type of Christ—“Aaron and his sons,” of the whole church.

8 This is of common concern to all saints, for as “sons of Aaron” all have an equality: though in another sense, when looked at as Levites, there may be distinction, and whilst all are equally servants, all near, one has to carry the ark, another the boards, etc. And it is in this our highest and proper character we are here spoken of. The Lord gives the instructions to Aaron the high priest as to how the “sons of Aaron” should draw nigh.

The Altar Of Abraham

Genesis 11:27; 12:1-7

We are going to examine the various circumstances which furnished Abraham occasion to offer his worship to God. We will also consider his walk and the character of his worship, and how he was led by faith to present this worship to God.

It is very precious to find in Genesis the elements and the broad principles of the relations of God with man in all their freshness, from the creation, sin, and the promise of the second Adam. We also see how the government of God was exercised; in what manner man fell; the judgment of the deluge, which put an end to the old world; the promises made to Abraham; the two covenants of Sarai and Hagar; the relations of God with the Jews in the beautiful typical history of Joseph. Thus, in a word, we find in Genesis, not only a history, but the grand bases of God's relations with man. Abraham under this holds a chief place as the depositary of the promises. We may understand this by what the apostle Paul says to the Galatians (chap. 3:13, 14): "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit, through faith."

We see by this word, "blessing of Abraham," the importance of that which is attributed to him. In considering the blessing of Abraham, we shall see the position God has made for us, in His grace, as to the accomplishment of the promises; even in considering it

as a principle, we shall better understand the glory of Christ, heir of all promises of God. It is true that the relations of Christ with the church were as yet hidden, having been revealed only after His death, save at least in type; nevertheless, the various aspects of the relations of God with man, in all their freshness, and the various cases in which they have place, are in the germ found in this book.

In chapter 9, after the account of the deluge, we find that Noah, to whom the government of the earth had been entrusted, fails in this position. He got drunk: we see then the iniquity of Ham, who mocked his father. Afterwards, in Babel, comes the separation of the nations, each after his tongue; chap. 10. In chapter 11 men, united amongst one another, exalt themselves against God. In the midst appears Nimrod, the violent man upon the earth; while the family of Shem, blessed in the earth, is that in the bosom of which God establishes particular relations with men. Babel presents itself, whether as the commencement of the kingdom of Nimrod, or as the false glory of those men whose unity was in Babel, and who were dispersed of God.

Such are the principal features of the three preceding chapters. Noah had failed; then the nations. Men exalted themselves against God instead of being subject to Him; they joined themselves together to make themselves a name, and not to be scattered; but their exaltation becomes the cause of their dispersion.

Before we stop at the race of Shem, concerning whom God is particularly occupied, one remark is needed. A terrible principle is come up in this state of things. Man exalts himself in separating from God. But, insufficient

to himself, he becomes a slave; he submits to Satan's power, serves him and adores him. Having abandoned God, Satan usurps this place; he alarms the conscience; he takes possession of the heart and energy of man, who gives himself up to idolatry.

You will find this fact in Joshua 24:2. It is the principle of Satan's power on earth; which adds to the history of man. Joshua furnishes us with this addition to the account of the things which came to pass after the deluge—the violence of man, the dispersion of the nations; that is, that the family of Shem even, these children of Heber, worshipped other gods than the true and living God. The apostle tells us they were demons. "The things which they sacrificed, they sacrificed to demons and not to God." Such is the new world; Satan becomes the ruler of the one we inhabit (a circumstance we set too much aside). God can deliver us, in one sense, from the yoke of Satan as ruler, although it abides true that this latter can tempt us by the lusts of this world, and make us fall morally under his yoke. For example, if the gospel be received outwardly in a country, and if the word of God have its free course there, whilst in another country evangelisation is not even permitted; it is evident that, in this latter, souls labour under a yoke which does not weigh in the former, and that Satan rules over one of these countries as he does not over the other. I believe it is important in these times to discern these two things.

The simple fact of being entrapped by one's own lusts is a yoke of Satan, but is not the rule of which we speak. Now, it may happen that several persons of the enfranchised country may be more guilty, for the very

reason that they have superior advantages; but the yoke is not the same.

Independence of God is the desire of all men. Man will do his own will, and he falls into the enemy's hand. Such was the state of Abraham's family, as of all other men. In the midst of this evil, God comes, and mamfests these three principles to Abraham; election, calling, and the promises. He finds him in the evil, and He calls him according to the choice He has made; then He gives the promises to him He has called, and Abraham receives them.

Besides this, we have the manner in which God does this. He manifests Himself, then He speaks. Often, in those days, He visibly did so. He came down to the earth and spoke to the individuals, and He has even done so since. Let the manner be what it may, He manifests Himself to faith by producing confidence. For example, when Jesus manifested Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus, He did so by a visible glory, but acting on the conscience and drawing the heart. Paul asks himself (1 Cor. 9) "Have not I seen Jesus Christ our Lord? "In Acts 7:2 you will find these words of Stephen: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran."

God manifests Himself to the conscience, which sees itself in the presence of God; it feels that God is there; it perceives beforehand a judgment which is impending; and, whatever be the lack of outward manifestation, man must find himself before God, must follow Him, whereas before this he did his own will. So it happened to Saul of Tarsus. Saul had not troubled himself about God's will; but as soon as he had heard Christ, he must

enlist himself. The effect produced in the heart is expressed in these words: “What wilt thou have me to do?” The communication of life, we know, takes place in the soul. Also, God speaks, even though He should have manifested Himself to the sight, as to Saul. It is His word which makes itself to be heard, even when it is written; and the written word is in fact of authority, without question, to judge what is said, though it were an apostle who spoke. The Lord Himself refers His disciples to it (“they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them,” Luke 16:29), and places it as an instrument above His own words. I say as an instrument, or rather, as a rule; for, whether written or from His own lips, it is from Himself.

The authority of the word is immediate. The Lord may employ Paul, Peter, John, as messengers, but He wills that it be received from Himself. The word of God, addressed to man, must be received on the sole authority, that it is God who has spoken it: if he does not know how to discern the voice of God arid to submit to it, without the authority of man, it is not faith in God; the man does not receive it because it is God. In the natural state, the heart does not hear His voice. The principle of Abraham is, that he believed God, and God put him to this trial. There is hard work in the heart of man before the authority of God—Himself be established in it.

I daily perceive more and more the importance of this. In an exercised soul which has felt that God has manifested Himself to it, which has known its responsibility, whose heart is in activity, the word has often but little authority. Such a soul may have received a strong impression. God has manifested Himself: the conscience is awakened; but it does not receive what

God has said in that quiet faith which, having owned that God has spoken, is arrested by His word, confides to it unhesitatingly, unquestioningly, and is found in peace.

We must not despise the first of these positions, neither must we abide in it. If I belong to God, I can no longer do my own will, and this is what God says to Abraham: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred." … This is neither pleasant, nor easy; but hearken to what Jesus says: "Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." There is the grand principle. God will have a people that absolutely belongs to Him.

Christ gave not Himself by halves: circumstances may vary, but the principle is ever the same. Whatsoever be the friends, the things which retain us, we must nevetheless come to this: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred." … This order is terrible to the flesh; it is not that we must hate our father and our mother as the flesh hates; notwithstanding the chain that is in oneself must be broken. It is from within the heart that we are detained; it is also from this we would escape; it is with self that we must break.

But God, who knows the heart, makes it deny itself, by making it break the ties with the world, which are without it. "Get thee out of thy country," says He. He goes further: "And from thy kindred and from thy father's house." Because God had manifested Himself to Abraham, he must belong to Him entirely. Abraham does it, but not completely. He did not, at first, all he ought to have done. He truly left his country and his kindred generally, but not his father's house; he goes no farther than Haran, and stays there.

He desires not, like many, to take all with him: he gives up a great deal; but this is useless: Terah cannot enter into Canaan. He was not called. In chapter n:31, Terah took his son Abraham, and Lot his grandson, and Sarah his daughter-in-law, Abraham's wife, and they went forth with him, from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran and dwelt there.

We see by this verse that Terah took Abraham; then he did not quit his father's house, and could not make much way. The thing is evident in Genesis 11; and Stephen speaks of it in these words, Acts 7:2, 4: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran," etc., "and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell." God had said to him: "Get thee out from thy father's house," but he leaves it not. Just so it happens to a heart which has not understood that it must give itself wholly to God. It gives up a great deal for duty, it receives nothing. When the question is of following God, it keeps something for itself. Nevertheless, grace acted towards Abraham, but thus it is that one often plunges oneself into doubt.

The Lord had said, Get out and come into the country that I will shew thee. Abraham, not having done so, might have said, What will become of me? I have not left my father's house: what will befall me? I have only followed half way the command of the Lord; I have not done all that He said to me; my heart not being in it, I have here neither the word nor the promises, I am about to perish in Charran. But such was not God's thought. Now, in chapter 12:1-4 it is said: "So Abraham departed as the Lord had said to him." All goes well. Lot goes with him; Abraham was seventy-five years old. They come not

to Haran to live there, but “into the land of Canaan they came.” That is to say, as to us, as soon as we will do God’s will, all goes well, God takes care for all. Before this, Abraham had stayed at Haran, and there was no blessing. It is only when his father Terah is dead that he goes forth and comes into Canaan. This is what we see in the four first verses of chapter 12. We may remark how God presents Himself to Abraham. He does not reproach him. The obstacles are removed; he is put in the way of faith.

In verse 7 God appears to Abraham; it is a fresh manifestation. He says to him: “Unto thy seed will I give this land.” He renews the promises in a more definite way; He had already brought him to live and walk in dependence on Himself; now, He shews him the land and renews to him the promises, explaining to him the accomplishment of them. He will give the land to his posterity. In our case, it is heaven. God wills that we also should be in blessing, walking in dependence on Him.

In verse 2 God had said to him: “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee”; in verse 3: “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” God will be glorified, and He will bless; two precious things, for He glorifies Himself by blessing. He encourages Abraham in the way of faith, by identifying himself with the blessing. He engages him to trust in Him; “I will bless them that bless thee.” Thus Balaam cannot curse; and in Jesus we are blest. God Himself conducts us, and identifies us with the blessing of Christ. The church may be tried, may encounter difficulties; Hut the blessing resulting from it is assured in Christ.

God then brings Abraham into Canaan: what is there for him there? Nothing as yet to be possessed. The Canaanites are there; enemies all around in this land of promise. He has only his faith for his pains, not a place where to set his foot on, which properly belonged to him. Stephen tells us so in Acts 7:5: “And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on; yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.”

This also happens to the church. In the land of promise we find the wicked spirits, and we are pilgrims here below. Abraham also was a stranger and a pilgrim. He had not where to set his foot. It is a little hard to the flesh to have forsaken all and to have found nothing. But he cannot yet possess the country. This happens to us as well as to the Jewish people, who went up to the wilderness, and find but a wilderness. Man must sacrifice all he loves, and rise to the height of the thoughts of God. But thus it is that the call and the deliverance make us strangers even in the very land of promise, until the execution of judgment be come.

We read in Hebrews 11:8: “By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” There is that which characterises his faith. “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” In drawing him by the path of faith and renunciation in the land of promise, God gives him nothing; but He sets him on a position elevated enough to see the city which hath foundations.

God draws us also into the wilderness; and when we are there, He gives us nothing; and if we ask for anything, God answers: It is not good enough. The disciples would have liked to remain and for Jesus to remain; but Jesus tells them, It is good enough for your heart, but not enough for Mine; I would not that you should remain where you are; but where I am, there ye shall be also. He desires a complete felicity for His own. He tells them, before leaving them, I go to prepare a place for you. For where I am, I desire that "there ye may be also."

When we are come out of this world and of that which keeps back our heart, then He can receive us. Abraham being thus separated from his earthly ties, He shews him the city which hath foundations. The great principle we find here is that, these Canaanites (to us the wicked spirits) not being yet driven out, we are strangers in the land; but, on the other hand, Abraham being in the land, the Lord appears to him. He had the revelations from God, no longer to make him walk (it was no longer a question of manifestation for the walk), but for him who has walked in order that he might enjoy God Himself.

I have wished you to observe, that God begins by making the conscience act. Afterwards He gives the enjoyment of Himself and of converse with Him after we have walked; such is the difference. The God of glory appeared indeed to Abraham in Ur. Thus perhaps He reveals Himself to our souls to draw them. But after that, He will have the conscience touched, and completely separates us from all that nature would retain, or by which nature would retain us, and that we should walk as called of God and belonging to Him, that

the heart may thus peacefully enjoy Him in communion with Him when we have walked.

God can speak to Abraham, not now to make him go on, but that he may enjoy Him and converse with Him; and, further, to communicate to him all His thoughts as to the fulfilment of the promises. God will bless. Here is his position. He has walked with God, but as yet possesses nothing of the inheritance in the place to which God has led him. The enemies are there. But the Lord appears to faithful Abraham. In the enjoyment there of this communion and of this hope, Abraham builds an altar to Him who thus appeared to him.

God introduces us into the position of promises, in order that we should render Him worship, and make us understand distinctly how He will accomplish His promises. When Christ shall appear, then we shall also appear with Him in glory. We shall have all things with Him.

The portion of God's child is communion, intelligence of the counsels of God for the enjoyment of what God will accomplish. Thou shalt be a stranger, but I will accomplish my promises in giving the land to thy posterity. "And Abraham builded an altar to God who had appeared to him." His first manifestation made him walk; this makes him worship in the joy of communion in the land of promise whereinto faith introduced him, and in the intelligence of the promise relative to it. We see God by faith, and how by-and-by He will fulfil the promise. He makes us see Jesus, the true "Seed" and "Heir" of all things, and gives us the enjoyment of it in our souls.

Abraham, stranger-like, goes here and there. He pitches his tent and builds an altar. It is all he has in the land. Happy and quiet he rests in the promise of God. And this also is what we ourselves have to do. Perhaps it will happen to us, as to Abraham, to buy a sepulchre (chap. 23), and that is all.

The Lord give to us a like position, that is to say, a quiet faith, like his who left all. God cannot be satisfied with a half-obedience; but, having walked in what God says, we may rest in His love and have His altar until He come in whom are all the promises; even Jesus, in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen to the glory of God by us.

The Sufferings And The Praises Of Christ

Psalm 22

The result of the truth taught in this psalm, is, that “they shall praise the Lord that seek him.” It is the fruit of unmingled grace, brought out in a very remarkable manner, and quite different from a hope or a promise. Assuredly that the Holy One should be forsaken of God is not promise, and such is the ground laid here for praise.

In Psalm 19 we have the testimony of creation and of the law. It is a solemn thought that whatever man has touched he has corrupted. Creation groans when a man has been there. But if I look where man cannot reach, at the moon, the stars, etc., all is glorious. The “heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work.” Next (v. 7 to 11) “The law of Jehovah is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes.” Here the point is not whether man can keep it or not, but its intrinsic perfection and its value for those who by grace profit by its light. Neither of these witnesses can be changed. Man early filled the earth with corruption and violence. “And God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; and God said, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them.” The heavens spread over all, and the sun going about in unwearied circuit from one end to the other, are the bright unchanging witnesses, above man’s defiling

hand, of the divine glory. As little does the law of Jehovah vary; but if man cannot change the law, he disobeys it. The effect of law is to claim from a sinful man that he should not be sinful.

Mark, in passing, the order of God's dealings. When sin came in, God said that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. This is not promise to Adam, but the judgment pronounced on Satan: if a promise, it is one to the second Man. Then comes a word of positive promise to Abraham, the father of the faithful: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Afterwards, when the offering had taken place on Moriah, the promises were made, unconditionally as before, to his Seed. But the question of righteousness must be raised, because God is the righteous God. Blessing under law depended on man's faithfulness, as well as God's. At Sinai it was said, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." The law raised the question of righteousness, and put man under obedience, instead of his taking his place as a sinner. "All the people answered together and said, all that Jehovah hath spoken we will do." This was law, and Israel under it: but "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Long afterwards rises another Witness—One who testified to the moral nature of God as well as His power—One who manifested the righteousness of God instead of merely claiming that of man—One who came, as it were, with all promises in Himself, if He had been received.

And how was Christ received? He was entirely rejected. In Psalm 20 Messiah is viewed in the day of trouble. So the Jews will see in their latter-day trouble, identifying

Jesus as their Saviour. Psalm 21 is the answer to their godly desire touching the Anointed of Jehovah, and the expression of their joy at His exaltation as King. He has been heard, and has His heart's desire given Him.

In Psalm 22 we have a totally different tiling. It is Christ forsaken of God. Not that He is not despised of the people there: strong bulls of Bashan beset Him round, dogs compassed Him, the assembly of the wicked enclosed Him; but all this, felt as none but Christ could feel, what was it in presence of the awful reality of Christ suffering from the hand of God—of Christ suffering for sin? It is a sad but useful picture, the side of man; for it is all the same nature—such were we; but turn it round, and what is the other side? Christ has brought out what God is, and this is love, even when it is a question of our sins.

What is man? What was Pilate? An unjust judge, who washed his hands, while he condemned to death the One whom he had thrice proclaimed to be guiltless; and this at the instigation—at the intercession!—of the chief priests and the rulers of God's people. And the disciples, what and where were they? "They all forsook him and fled." And Peter followed him afar off." When he comes into the palace, he curses and swears, and denies Jesus again and again. Take man where you will, and if Christ be there, everything is put to the test; only sin comes out. His cross, His death revealed the real character of all. The history of man, morally, is closed. "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Man has been weighed and found wanting in every way. "The flesh profiteth nothing"; it breaks law, and abuses grace. The end of all I am as man I read in the cross. "But where sin

abounded, grace did much more abound." For there is another thing altogether there. On the cross hung the one spotless, blessed Man, yet forsaken of God. What a fact before the world! No wonder the sun was darkened —the central and splendid witness to God's glory in nature, when the Faithful and True Witness cried to His God and was not heard.

Forsaken of God! what does this mean? What has man to do with it? What part have I in the cross? One single part—my sins. Here then is One forsaken of God and saying it aloud before all men. There is none to see and sympathise as in Psalm 20. The women who followed from Galilee were there afar off, but they understood not. It baffles thought, that most solemn lonely hour which stands aloof from all before or after. How does not the perfectness of Christ shine in it! "The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth"; yet was his spirit provoked, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job?" yet he opened his mouth to curse his day, and murmured that the Preserver of man had set him as a mark, so that he was a burden to himself. In Christ nothing was brought out but what was perfect.

But if I have to say to Christ, what is my first thought? What do I bring to the cross? What have I in it? My sins. There is not a vanity we have not preferred to Him. What a humbling thought for us, for me! The Righteous One in suffering for sin, vindicates God, though to Himself the depth of agony, when God forsook Him, when most, we may say, He needed God. "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee and were delivered:

they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm," etc. It was obedience—suffering—to the uttermost; but forsaken as He was, Christ says, His God was holy all the same. We know now, why it was. It was for sin, for our sins, not for righteousness. Our sins were our only contribution. What a tale that tells on our part: on His, O what blessed love!

The wonderful truth is that the Son of God came into the world, and in the cross God has made Him sin who knew no sin. The sinless Saviour has drunk the cup of wrath. It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him—to make His soul an offering for sin. He has borne our iniquities. What is the consequence? He died under the burden of sin, and what becomes of it? It is clean gone; not that it has been glossed over, but put away by the sacrifice of Himself.

Thus, before the day of judgment, sin has been thoroughly dealt with by God in the cross of Christ. There will be a day of judgment, and those who believe not will find everlasting condemnation there. But for those who believe, there has been already judgment in Christ. God must judge sinners; but were this all, where would be His love? If He overlooked sin, where His holiness? That would not be love but indifference to evil. When I see the cross, I see the perfect desert of sin, and that not in the destruction of the sinner, but in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, suffering once the just for the unjust that He might bring us to the God who was glorified in the sins being thus completely blotted out. Christ took sin in His own body on the tree, laid down the life in which He bore it, and rose absolutely without it. Now then the question of righteousness is not raised only, but settled. Neither is it any longer a promise, but a work done. There are promises for the

believer to enjoy in their season; but the suffering on the cross is ended and past. Redemption is neither creation, nor law, nor promises, but a divine work wrought about sin and already accomplished in Christ through His blood—in Christ now accepted of God and glorified at His right hand.

Hence, if sin was judgment to Christ, it results in nothing but grace to us in and through Him. For if God takes up sin in my case at the day of judgment, I am lost. But I say, He has taken it up in Christ, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; and now there flows a stream of unmingled grace. For it is not only that the unsparing wrath of God fell on Christ crucified, but that Christ enters into all the delight of God after putting away sin. God was now no longer a judge and an avenger, but a Deliverer from death and all the consequences of the sin Christ had taken on Himself; His glory as God and as Father was concerned in raising Christ from the dead, and setting Him in righteous glory as Man and in infinite delight as Son before Him.

What a change there is now! Christ is heard from the horns of the unicorns. Resurrection is the answer of His God and Father. But, mark, Christ has people whom He calls His brethren, and to them He must go and tell it all. God has righteously and in perfect love brought Him back from the grave; and now says the Lord, “I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise to thee.” Never had the divine complacency in Christ been so complete as on the cross—never was God so glorified as in Him there; but there was not, nor could be, the enjoyment of communion in that awful hour, when sin was judged as it never will be again. But now, sin-bearing was over, and

God so perfectly justified and glorified in it, that it became a question of Christ's bringing others into the place of holy joy and peace, and His own relationship to His God and Father.

Mary Magdalene wept at the grave, for she loved the Lord and knew not salvation in Him risen. "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." To her apprehensions, if He were gone all was lost. But Jesus made Himself known to her in resurrection, and says, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." For whom was the work done, but for them? But more than this. God was His Father, He was theirs; if His God, He was theirs also. He brings the disciples into the same place He has entered Himself.

If you love your children thoroughly, you desire them to have the same place as yourself. It was so with Christ. He could suffer alone, but, that finished, could He praise alone? No: "in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise to thee." All the suffering and sorrow were His; His joy He would share with those He loved. He Himself leads their praises. He is come out from unutterable, unfathomable agony and shame, and does He keep silence? Does not His tone of praise well assort with the darkness He was in? Does not fulness of joy now answer to God's forsaking Him then for our sin? Compare verses 24, 25. He had been in the depths for us, but now He is out and praising; and how should we praise? With Him in the certainty of what He has wrought. God would have us free before Him in joy by virtue of what Christ has done; He would have us judging every evil, for it is a

holy place, but the place He is in is the result of His work and He gives it—nothing less than it—to us. Could I go into the presence of God in my sins? I should flee from Him like Adam. But, believing in Christ, I am in God's presence, because He has brought me there.

Are you then seeking God? Have you heard the voice of Christ? It is no longer the cry of deepest grief unheard. The atonement is made, He Himself is raised from the dead, the accepted glorified Saviour; and what to Him the change from the affliction of the afflicted to His joy as risen? He gathers around Him those who receive Him, and in their midst sings praises to God. If you seek God now, you are entitled by His work to take up and join in His songs of praise. For it is net a promise, but an accomplished fact. Do I believe in Christ? If so, I am before the throne of God (in title, not in fact, of course) by virtue of the cross; I am inside the veil, and my sins are left for ever behind me.

From verse 22 we find nothing but grace. Do you who seek God say, Oh that I could find Him? But He has found you. Come then and praise Him. Christ has been on the cross, bearing pur sins. You have to learn it as an accomplished fact; not saying, I hope He will do it. The work is done., sin is entirely put away, and Christ the leader of praise, according to His estimate of sin, of wrath due to it, borne in grace, and of the perfect deliverance displayed in His own resurrection. Thenceforward is heard praise, and praise only. First, Christ in the midst of the congregation praises God, and those that fear Jehovah are called to praise Him; v. 22, 23. Then His praise is anticipated "in the great congregation," and "they shall praise Jehovah that seek him: … all the ends of the world shall remember and

turn unto the Lord," v. 25-27. In the millennial earth the homage will be universal, "all they that be fat upon earth"— "all they that go down to the dust"; yea, and not that race then alive only, for they "shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this."

In the light there are exercises of conscience, but how do I get there? Because Christ put away sin and I receive Him. True, we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; but it is the judgment-seat of Him who loved me and gave Himself for me, who saved me and in whom I am accepted. If Christ had to do with a Pharisee, He soon unmasked him; but to one who came to Him as a poor sinner, He was always grace, as to the woman in Luke 7. Never did He deal roughly with one soul who came in the truth of its condition: to such He spoke and wrought in the truth of His own grace. That sinful woman was attracted by divine love in Christ, and hears Him pronounce her many sins forgiven. She knew His great love, and loved much. When He comes to this, He does not trouble Himself more about the Pharisee, but says to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." And no wonder; for it is the self-same thing which brightens heaven that made her heart bright.

We must, then, be all manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, before the Person who by His death put away all my sins. What a blessing to find Him on the judgment-seat! There is nothing in this to disturb the peace He has made by the blood of His cross; and peace we must have in order to enjoy communion with God. Can two walk together, except they are agreed?

Then think how it is we get there. Christ will come and receive me to Himself, because He loves me, and wants me to be with Him where He is; and how do I arrive? Glorified in a body like His own. Do you ask, How can people speak thus? I answer by the question, How can you be in heaven in any other way? He who of God is made unto us righteousness is the Judge. To believe in His name and yet doubt that we have peace, is calling in question the value of His work. He who suffered and is now glorified will not gainsay it when He judges. But then there will be nothing secret—all will come to light. What a lesson for us when in glory! And what is the effect? I look on my past life, and what have I been? I look since I have been a Christian, and what feebleness, what failure! But am I therefore to be afraid? No: I look at God and say, What a God I have had to do with! Every step is a manifestation of my Father's love, who has led me along the way. In glory I shall see all my foolishness, but it will be in the body risen or changed. I shall learn the love of Christ in every tittle of my life from beginning to end.

Are your voices tuned to praise with Christ? He is gone from the wrath and darkness of the cross into the light and love of His Father's presence, and is praising. Can you praise with Him? There all trembling disappears. Do you believe "he hath done this "? Oh, beloved, how those who seek Him lag behind His heart! What is it you believe? and in Whom? Do you not know that He drank the cup to the dregs? and is all uncertain to you still? If you think of what you are, I say you are a thousand miles off what you ought to be. If you seek Him, His word warrants that you shall praise Him. He is in the presence of God as the consequence of His work. May

your hearts set to their seal that God is true! As a Father, He may chasten, but the chastenings are a Father's ways with children's hearts. May you not reject the testimony of Jesus that He has spent His life, having suffered once the just for the unjust, that your souls may have present peace with God. "He hath done this."

Sifted As Wheat; Or, Simon Peter

Remarks on Luke 22:14-34

How good and precious it is that we have at all times the Lord to look to; for if our eye had always to be fixed upon self, not only should we not advance, but we should be thoroughly discouraged by the thought of the evil within us. We confine ourselves to the idea of the evil, and thus deprive ourselves of the strength which can overcome it.

The nature of the flesh and the blindness of man's heart are worthy of remark. What foolish things come between God and us, to hide from us that which we ought to see! How strangely, too, do the thoughts of the natural heart follow their natural course (even when the Lord is near us), and deprive us of the consciousness of the most striking things, which have a sensible effect around us! We find this presented in the portion before us.

The Lord Jesus was about to accomplish that work which can be compared to no other; He was on the point of bearing the wrath of God for us poor sinners; He was in circumstances which ought to have touched His disciples' hearts. He had just spoken, in the most touching terms, of the passover which He desired to eat once more with them before He suffered; He had told them, too, that one of them should betray Him. All this ought to have rested upon their minds and have filled their hearts. But they? They were striving among themselves which of them was the greatest!

To us the curtain is withdrawn; and when reading of this fact, we can hardly understand how they could be

busied with such things; but we know what was then about to take place. How many things have power to turn even us, who have more light than they, from the thought which then filled the heart of Jesus! Such is the heart of man in presence of the most serious and solemn things. The death of Jesus should exercise the same influence on our hearts as on the disciples'; it should be precious to us.

The Lord is with us when we are gathered two or three together; and yet we well know the thoughts which then pass through our hearts and minds. Here we see the same thing under the circumstances most calculated to touch the heart. Jesus tells His disciples that His blood was to be shed for them: "the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me at the table, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed"; and they inquire among themselves which of them it was that should do this thing. One might suppose that they would think of nothing save the death of their gracious Master; but no! "There was a strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest." What a contrast! But, alas! if we examine our own hearts we shall find these two things generally brought together, namely, real feelings which bear testimony to our love of Jesus, but also, and perhaps within the same half-hour, thoughts which are as unworthy as this strife among the disciples. This shews the folly and vanity of man's heart; he is but as the small dust of the balance.

The Lord, ever full of gentleness and meekness, forgets Himself in His care for His disciples, and says to them, "He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." He knows how to teach them, by His own example, what the

love of God is; and at the same time He shews them the grace which is in Him, and all the faithfulness for which they are indebted to Him. It is as though He had said, Ye need not raise yourselves: my Father will raise you. “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Instead of being irritated by the abominable conduct of His disciples, He shews them that, if there is no grace in men, there is grace in one Man, that is in Himself. This grace is perfect in Jesus; and He places His disciples in it, whatever they may have been toward Him. He has fixed them firmly in the principle of grace, instead of the folly of the flesh which had just shewn itself among them; as though He had said, I am all grace towards you, and I trust the kingdom to you.

We are put under grace, and its voice is always heard. It assures us that, notwithstanding all our weakness, we have continued with Jesus, and that He gives the kingdom as His Father gave it to Him. Nevertheless the soul which is to enjoy these things must be exercised. The flesh must be made manifest to us as men; and therein we see the needs-be of all the trials we pass through; but Jesus enables us to persevere, because we belong to Him. If He says to His disciples, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, ye shall sit on thrones,” etc., etc., He takes care to shew them what the flesh is.

“Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” He does not say, Thou shalt

not be tempted; I will hinder Satan from sifting thee; no, nor does He do it. We see here that God often leaves His children in the presence of their enemy, whom He does not destroy; but, even while thus in the presence of the enemy, He watches over His own; as we see (Rev. 2:10), “The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

Peter might have said to the Lord, Thou canst hinder my being thus sifted, as Martha and Mary thought Jesus could have hindered the death of Lazarus; and, truly, He who can give the crown of life can shelter us; but He does not do so, that we may be tried. Satan desired to have Job to sift him like wheat, and God permitted him to do so; and this happens to us also. We often say within ourselves, Why has He dealt thus with me? Why has He put me in such or such a crucible? Ah, it is Satan who desired, and God who permitted it. Things often occur which we cannot understand; such things are intended to shew us what the flesh is.

When God is about to use a Christian in His work, He takes the one who has gone the farthest in the path of trial. Thus here it is said, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you.” The danger is presented to all; but He adds, speaking to Peter, “I have prayed for thee,” for thee in particular; for Jesus distinguishes him from all the rest because he had taken a more prominent position than the others, and was thus more exposed, though they were all sifted at the death of Jesus.

The Lord then says to Peter, “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” He was not going to spare any of His disciples the sifting; but Peter was to be the most

severely tried, and, therefore, the best to strengthen his brethren. Notwithstanding all this, Peter is full of self-confidence. “I am ready to go with thee both unto prison and to death.” But Jesus replies, “The cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.”

The flesh acting in Peter had only power to carry him up to the time of trial, and there failed; for Peter denied the Lord Jesus, even in His very presence. He might have seen his Saviour, if his heart had not been turned away from Him. Jesus was looking at him; and yet he denied Him to the maid, saying, “I know him not.” He had been warned; but the Lord would not allow him to be kept by divine power at that moment, because he needed to learn by experience what he was in himself.

If we notice all that Christ did, we shall see how He was watching at this time over Peter; His grace (so to speak) went out to meet him, and took care of him all through the temptation. The first thing that Jesus tells him is that He has prayed for him. It is not that Peter’s repentance led to Jesus’ intercession; but the intercession of Jesus brought about Peter’s repentance. “I have prayed for thee,” and “Jesus looked on Peter.” As to Judas, he denied the Lord; and, when his conscience was awakened, he killed himself. No sooner was the crime committed than all confidence fled, and he went and killed himself. But, here, the effect of the prayer of Jesus was to preserve faith at the bottom of Peter’s heart, so that, when Jesus looked on him, he was broken down.

The first thing to remark is, that the Lord had prayed for Peter; and the second, that He always remembered His disciple, and as soon as the cock crowed, Jesus looked

on him, and Peter wept bitterly. It is in this way the Lord deals with us, He prays for us, and allows us to go into temptation. If He conducts us when in it, He also bids us to pray that we enter not into temptation: but God permits all this because He sees the end of it. If Peter had been conscious of his own weakness, he would not have dared to shew himself before the High Priest. This trial was the natural consequence of what he was in the flesh; but it was God's purpose to use him, and even to put him in a prominent position in His work. The cause of his fall was self-confidence; the flesh was actively present.

God did everything well for him, and Peter saw what was the power of Satan's sifting. The other disciples, not having the same fleshly strength, fled at once. They had not so much confidence as Peter; but God left him to struggle against Satan, and Jesus prayed for him, in spite of his fall, that his faith should not fail. The moment Peter fell, the eye of Jesus was turned upon him. That look did not give peace, but confusion of face; Peter wept; he went out, and it was all over. He had learnt what he was. There was his failure—the sin was committed, and could not be undone; it could be pardoned, but never blotted out. Peter could not forget that he had betrayed the Lord: but Jesus made use of this fall to cure him of his presumption.

It is the same with us. We often commit faults which are irreparable, from too much confidence in the flesh. When there is no possibility of correcting one's faults, what is to be done? The only resource is to cast oneself on the grace of God. When the flesh is too strong, God often permits us to fall, because we are not in that precious state of dependence which would preserve us.

Jacob had too deeply offended Esau not to dread his anger; yet God did not leave him in his brother's hand, but gave him enough faith to carry him through the difficulty. God wrestled with Jacob, and the latter prevailed; but he must have felt within his heart what it is to have had to do with evil. God would not allow him to be given over to the hatred of Esau; and at the end of his course Jacob could say (Gen. 48:15, 16), "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil," etc.

When God tries the heart in this way, He sometimes leaves it in Satan's hands, but He never leaves the consciences of His children in the enemy's hands. Judas' conscience was in Satan's hands, and, therefore, he fell into despair. Peter's heart was in his hands for a time, but his conscience never. Therefore, instead of despairing, like Judas, the love of Jesus, expressed in a look, had power to touch his heart.

Directly grace acts in the heart, it gives the consciousness of sin; but, at the same time, the love of Christ reaches the conscience, deepening the consciousness of sin; but if this is deep, it is because the consciousness of the love of Christ is also deep. Perfect as was the pardon of Peter, he could never forget his sin. Not only was he fully forgiven, but his conscience was in the Lord's hand when the Holy Ghost revealed the fulness of the heart of Jesus to him. His conscience had been so fully purified, that he could accuse the Jews of the very sin he had himself committed under the most solemn circumstances. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just," were his words. The blood of Christ had fully cleansed his conscience; but if the question of his strength in the flesh was raised, all he had to say of

himself was, I have denied the Lord; and, were it not for His pure grace, I could not open my mouth.

Jesus never reproached Peter with his sin in those conversations He had with him. There is never the question, Why hast thou denied me? No; He does not once remind him of his failure: on the contrary, He acts according to that expression of love of the Holy Spirit, “I will remember their sins no more.” Jesus had forgotten all. But there was one thing He had to shew Peter; it was the root of the sin, the point where he had failed. Satan’s temptation, with his own want of love, had been the cause of his fall, and had destroyed his confidence; but now, his conscience being touched, it was needful that his spiritual intelligence should be formed. Peter had boasted of more love to Jesus than the rest; and Peter had failed more than all.

Then Jesus said to him, “Lovest thou me more than these?” Where is now Peter’s self-confidence? Jesus repeats three times, “Lovest thou me?” but He does not remind him of his history. Peter’s answer is, “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” He appeals to Jesus, and to His divine knowledge; “Thou knowest that I love thee.” This is what Jesus did for Peter, and that after his fall.

Jesus had foretold his failure; and here He asked him, “Lovest thou me more than these?” Peter can say nothing, save that he has learnt his weakness and that he has loved Jesus less than the other disciples. The relationship between Jesus and Peter is all of grace; he had no resource except to confide in Jesus, and now he could be a witness for Him; he had felt the power of a look of Jesus.

Peter seems to say, I confide in thee, thou knowest how I have denied thee; do with me what seemeth thee good. Then we see Jesus sustaining His disciple's heart, lest Satan should rob him of his confidence, and saying, "When thou art convened, strengthen thy brethren." What enabled him to strengthen his brethren? His denial had so taught him what the flesh was, that he would no longer bind himself to anything; he knew that he had nothing to do save to trust God. Whatever his own incapacity to resist Satan, he could appeal to the grace of Him who knows all things. The knowledge that he could confide in Jesus, was that which made him strong. It was after reminding Peter of the utter incapacity of the flesh, that the Lord confided His sheep to him: "Feed my lambs"—and it was not till then that he could strengthen his brethren.

The flesh has a certain confidence in the flesh, and this is often the folly into which we fall. It is then necessary for us to learn ourselves by conflict with Satan; every Christian has to learn what he is through the circumstances in which he is placed. God leaves us there to be sifted by Satan, that we. may learn our own hearts. Had we enough humility and faithfulness to say, I can do nothing without Thee, God would not leave us to this sad experience of our infirmity. When we are really weak, God never leaves us; but, when unconscious of our infirmities, we have to learn them by experience.

If a Christian does not walk under a constant sense of his infirmity, God leaves him in the presence of Satan, that he may there be taught it. It is then also that he commits faults which are often irreparable; and it is this which is the most sorrowful part of all.

Jacob halted all his life. Why was this? It was because he had halted, morally, during one-and-twenty years. He wrestled mightily, yet he must have been conscious what a feeble creature he was in the flesh, although God did not leave him to struggle with Esau. We need never be surprised if the Lord leaves us in difficulty; it is because there is something in us to be broken down, and which we need to be made sensible of; but grace is always behind all this. Christ is all grace, and if He sometimes appears to leave us to learn our weakness, still He is grace, perfect grace, towards us.

It was not when Peter turned his eyes towards the Lord that Jesus shewed Himself to him; as to communion, indeed, this is true, but it was before his fall that Jesus had said, “I have prayed for thee,” for it is always grace which anticipates us. Jesus sees what Satan desires, and leaves us to that desire, but He takes care that we should be kept. It was not when Peter looked at Jesus, but when Jesus looked on Peter, that the latter wept bitterly. The love of Christ always precedes His own; it accompanies us, precedes us in our difficulties, and carries us through all obstacles. While it leaves us in Satan’s hands, that we may learn experimentally what we are, it is always near to us, and knows how to guard us from the wiles of the enemy. Here we see the perfect goodness and grace of the One who loves us, not only when our hearts are turned towards Him, but who adapts Himself to every fault in our characters, that we may be fully and completely blessed according to the counsels of God.

All this shouid teach us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due season. When I feel cast down and grieved in thinking of myself

after a fall, I ought not then forthwith to seek comfort, however natural that may be: no; it is not that which I am to seek, but rather, and first of all, the Christ who is there; I have to learn the lesson which God has traced for me.

If, in the midst of painful circumstances, you say that you cannot understand the teaching, God knows what it is, and He leaves you there to be sifted, in order to bring you by this means to a deeper knowledge of Him and yourself; He wishes to shew you all He has Himself seen in you, so that we ought not to shrink from this sifting, but rather to seek to receive the precious teaching which the Lord offers us through it; and thus we shall obtain a much deeper knowledge of what He is for us.

We must learn to yield ourselves to His mighty hand, till He exalts us. May God give us to know Him alone! If we had only to learn what we are, we should be cast down, and sink into despondency; but His object in giving us a knowledge of ourselves and of His grace, is to give us an expected end.

One can say then, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

“The Last Words Of David”

2 Samuel 22; 23:1-7

There is a remarkable contrast between the two songs in these chapters: the song of David after he had done with all his enemies (that is, after his trials by Saul), and the song of David after he had done with himself; here brought together by the Spirit of God.

At the end of his trials, when looking back at his enemies, he sings of joy and triumph: all is exaltation. After his experience of the blessing, it is, “Although my house be not so with God.” The end of all the sorrow and trial with Saul is rejoicing, exaltation, and strength. “The waves of death had compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid, the sorrows of hell compassed me about, and the snares of death prevented me”; yet, the result of all he thus went through, in deep and bitter exercise of soul, is triumph, thanksgiving, and praise in the first instance, when he recounts God’s deliverance; while, in the second, the result of the place of honour, blessing, and triumph, is deeper and bitter sorrow—the confession, “my house is not so with God!” Not that he was without something to sustain his heart under it all; for he adds, “yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” For this he waited until the “morning without clouds.” But the end of all his blessing here is, “my house is not so with, God.” This contrast makes trouble precious, and is a check to any desire to get out of it.

So practically is it with us. We need to guard against the effects of success; the pressure of circumstances which keep me down produces nothing but joy and praise in

the experience of God's goodness; the effect of circumstances which lift me up is sorrow. How often has a saint, when in trial and conscious weakness, cast therein upon the Lord, cried unto Him, and as a faithful servant been sustained, had blessing and acquired influence, godly influence too; but how often satisfied with the blessing and the influence thus acquired and losing the sense of his weakness, has he stopped suddenly short in his course, been arrested in the point of influence obtained, and become comparatively useless in the church of God! This should lead us to desire conformity in suffering to Jesus. The path of grace is, like Him, to be getting on nearer and nearer to the Father, but to be getting nothing here.

There are three things brought before us in these chapters: one of them intended to give us solemn warning: First, the result of David's trials at the hand of Saul. Then, second, when set upon the throne, the consequence of his being surrounded with all the earthly blessings. And, third, the joy at the end, of "the sweet psalmist of Israel," in anticipation of the "morning without clouds."

Whilst the heart receives the warning against the effects of success, or anything in present blessing, are we looking out for and resting on, the full, distinct, and perfect blessing, which will be in that day when the Lord Jesus comes? We see here the way in which the Spirit of Christ gathers up the history of Israel in Christ as a centre, and makes the harp of David that on which it should be played. There is perhaps nothing of deeper interest than to see how God takes up the history of David in the Psalms, writing as it were upon the tablets of David's heart the history of the Lord Jesus.

In the first song there is a remarkable allusion to the whole history of Israel, to dealings of God with them, of which David felt the moral power in himself. We have a wonderful variety of circumstances, backward, forward, and around, gathering up all the history of David, and the triumphs of David; unfolding the sympathies of Christ with the heart of David in sorrow, until he is made the head of the heathen, his own people being blessed under him.

In chapter 23 we get “the last words of David.” And here we learn where his eye and heart rested, amidst consciousness of his own failure, and the failure of his house. He was looking for the “morning without clouds,” for the One who should rule over men in the fear of the Lord, who should build God’s house, and in whom the glory should be manifested. These men of Belial too, there must come one in the sternness of judgment to set them aside: then “they should all of them be as thorns thrust away.” There is the deep consciousness of all the ruin, but the effect of the coming morning shining into it. The effect of the coming of the Son of David on David’s heart, and the failure of everything around, leading him to reach forward in spirit to the full triumph of that day when all should be full of blessing.

We thus, in the two chapters, have the unfolding of the sympathies of Christ with the heart of David, gathering up all the sorrows of the history of Israel; and also the heart of David resting in the consciousness of what the “morning without clouds” would be. We should seek so to get the power of the Spirit in the sympathies of Christ, and at the same time to reach out to the hope which the Spirit of God sets before us, as by the way to be thrown upon the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.

Let us now trace a little what David was, up to the time of this success. It is ever just the very thing that seems hopeless in the eyes of man, which is taken up of God. See Sarah, Rebekah, Zecharias, and Elizabeth, so too here with David. In him there was everything contrary to the thoughts of the flesh. Contrast him with Saul. Saul was the comeliest man in Israel, taller than them all by the head; “from the shoulders and upwards he was higher than any of the people”—strength in the flesh. But all this is passed by, and it is the “lad keeping sheep” that is taken up! Saul is unfaithful—rejected from being king, and then God sets His eye upon David.

Samuel, by the Spirit of prophecy (1 Sam. 16), goes down to Bethlehem, to select from among the sons of Jesse one who should be king in the room of Saul. He causes them to pass before him. Seven come in. Samuel asks, Is there not another? Yes, a lad keeping the sheep. “Send and fetch him.” David comes, and is designated by the Spirit of prophecy as the anointed of Jehovah. All that is great in Jesse’s eyes is suffered to pass unnoticed; the seven were personable men, but it is the lad keeping the sheep, the eighth, the weak one, that is preferred and taken up!

From that time the Spirit of God departs from Saul, and an evil spirit falls upon him. David is brought into his company as one who could play upon the harp. Here we find him of no importance, so that afterwards, when he had killed the giant Goliath, on Saul’s inquiring of Abner, “whose son is this youth?” Abner says, “I cannot tell.” His brethren too ask him, “with whom he has left the few sheep in the wilderness.”

But what traits do we find in David? Deep consciousness of having God's strength, and forgetfulness of self in all the difficulties which come in the way of duty. He keeps his father's sheep: a lion and a bear come to take a lamb of the flock. It is his business to guard sheep, and he goes at once against the lion and the bear, and slays them. These energetic works are done with simple reference to duty: therefore the difficulties are as nothing.

Here we see faith in operation. Faith recognises God and duty to God; and then the thing is a matter of course. Put a child to raise up a stone, and it is all effort; put a strong man, and the thing is easily accomplished. Faith realises the strength of God without reckoning on self, and so does that which comes in the way, and thinks nothing about it. David here in the path of duty gathers up the consciousness of having God's strength with him to be used in after trial. The secret of strength, thus learnt in retirement, prepares him for that which the Lord has subsequently for him to do. Blessing still followed the career of Saul; we read "whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed his enemies." Though evil, seeking his own, and rejected from being king, there is blessing to Israel through him. But the Lord in secret had set His eye on David.

The Philistines are gathered together to battle against Israel (chap. 17): David goes up to the camp, sent by his father, with provisions for his brethren, where he hears Goliath challenging Israel. Having learnt in the simplicity of the path of duty with the God of Israel, when no eye was upon him, that He was a faithful God, now that he comes to see the people of God, and Goliath against them, he is astonished at finding them all afraid,

and asks, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” Why, he is an uncircumcised Philistine, and he is defying the armies of the living God! Bad motives are imputed to him by his brother, for coming to the camp; but there is in him such simplicity of heart in recognising God, that the path of duty is straightforward, and in power. Whether as a shepherd, whose business it was to guard the sheep, if the lion came, he took him by the beard and slew him, or the bear in like manner, he slew it, without display and without boast; they were simply matters of duty, and are untold until there is a needed occasion for mentioning them; or, if afterwards, it be this uncircumcised Philistine, it is the same thing, “he shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God!” Onward he moves in the energy of faith; he looks not to Israel for help; he rejects the proffered armour of Saul; he thinks not of the spear like a weaver’s beam. Is this uncircumcised Philistine to defy the God of Israel? that is the question; and he says, “This day will Jehovah deliver thee into my hands!” His heart is on Israel, he takes up the relationship of God with Israel. Although the exercise of faith depend on a single individual, “the battle is Jehovah’s”; he identifies the glory of God with Israel, and then the “uncircumcised Philistine “can have no power at all. With a sling and a stone from the brook he destroys the Philistine, and cuts off his head with his own sword; as it is said of Jesus—that He destroyed through death him that had the power of death, by the very weapon of him who had the power.

His heart rested on the faithfulness of the God of saints. This was the secret of his strength, learnt by himself, to be acted upon in any circumstance. And this is always

the character of faith. Faith, when acting, brings in God —makes God everything, circumstances nothing. Whether it be the lion and the bear, or the uncircumcised Phihstine, it is the same thing. The secret of God's strength, learnt when alone, is that by which faith looks upon every circumstance as the same, making God the great circumstance that governs all else.

After this they begin to sing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands"; and then David becomes the object of Saul's hatred. "Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Subsequently we find in the character of David, when in the midst of mighty enemies, the consciousness of weakness and infirmity, and the absence of all thought of avenging himself against Saul. He never takes a single step without consulting God, save in one instance; and then he gets chastened for it. Everything is against him: he is conscious of being in the midst of subtle enemies, and of conflicting with a power which he cannot set aside. Saul seeks his life (chap. 18:10, 11), but he has no right to set aside the power of Saul.9 The enemy cannot be got rid of, and therefore he is forced to go to the Lord for guidance as to every step he takes.

So is it with the saints. And this is just what they need now—the consciousness of conflicting with a power which they cannot set aside; and the sense of their own utter weakness, so as to be forced into direct reference to God in every circumstance, to be thrown into dependence upon Him for every step. At last Saul drives him fairly away: full hostility is manifested; and he becomes an outcast. All this is necessary for the exercise of his faith, and he gets practised thereby in waiting on

the Lord, “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God.” He escapes to the cave of Adullam (chap. 22), is separate from all that God is about to judge, and gathers together his mighty men. The beginning of this chapter opens with a most miserable scene, “Every one in distress, and every one in debt, and every one that is discontented,” gathering themselves unto David in the cave of Adullam; but with these outcasts, we find God’s prophet,10 God’s priest, and God’s king: all that God really owned was there.

Let us follow David in his course. Through all the scene we find him in constant dependence on God’s strength, not avenging himself, but ever gracious to Saul when in his power. See chaps. 24, 26. Such is his constant dependence on the strength of God, that no matter what the consciousness of weakness, however reproach may break his heart, the moment he is in the presence of the power of ungodliness, he confesses unworthiness of self; but still he can take the place of superiority, just as Jacob when recounting all the misery of the days of the years of his pilgrimage, blessing Pharaoh there. That poor weak man became identified with God, could stand in conscious superiority in the presence of the power and glory of the world, as faith always does; and thus, in the very confession of weakness, take the place of the better: “the less is blessed of the better.”

David had led a miserable, sorrowful life, because of Saul; and when Abishai says, “God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand, this day,” he answers, “Jehovah forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against Jehovah’s anointed.” Again, when pleading with Saul, “Jehovah judge between me and thee, and Jehovah avenge me of thee, but mine hand shall not be upon

thee." "Jehovah deliver me out of thine hand." So was it with the Lord Jesus, "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed his cause to him who judgeth righteously."

And this is what the church is called upon to do amidst enemies whom it cannot set aside. If seeking God's glory, we shall not want to justify ourselves: there may be entreaty ("being defamed, we entreat"), but not haughty self-vindication. Peter says, "If when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." This is a strange principle for anything but faith. But as a saint I cannot, whilst the usurper is in power, take my portion (just as David could not touch Jehovah's anointed); there is "a morning without clouds" coming, when the true King will be set up—then I shall have it: now it is doing well, suffering for it, and taking it patiently, just what the Lord Jesus did; but with this comfort—the consciousness that "that is acceptable with God."

At last (chap. 28) Saul is in the sad, terrible condition, that Jehovah has departed from him. The day comes when he has to sink down with the consciousness of not having the answer of Jehovah, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. All depart from him, and are with the suffering man who had nothing here. Then Saul falls, Jonathan falls, and David takes the kingdom. And now we come to a sad picture; we see a different line of conduct in David.

What marks his confidence as king in his own house? He trusts in his own power. "I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains"; he is going to build the temple when he had no word from Jehovah

to do it. The thing itself is not bad which he purposes, but he has not the perception of the mind of Jehovah about it, because he has not consulted, he has not waited upon Him. We find in him now the want of that direct reference to Jehovah which had so marked his previous course,11 he trusts in his own strength, lives in self-indulgence, and then falls into gross sin.

Self-will having come in, self-indulgence follows; then there is the breaking out of positive sin in the murder of Uriah, and adultery with Bath-sheba: and afterwards distrust of Jehovah, in the numbering of the people!

The end of all this is the word of Jehovah by the prophet, that the sword should never depart from his house. David is chastened, repentance given, and the sin put away; but the sword departs not from his house.

In this latter part of the history of David, we see the consequence of blessing, the result of faith, when used in the flesh and for himself. It is not that he was like Saul, beginning in the flesh, ending in the flesh, and not blest at all. It is a lovely picture of faith, a humble, gracious walk, up to the time of his being king in his own house. Jehovah had said, “I have found a man after my own heart” (not that his conduct was so, but “a man after mine own heart”); he was a godly man with grace shining in a lovely way, and in the end there is rich blessing.

But we see the godly man blessed, and the results of his fidelity too much for the faith that brought him there! Grace shines through, and there is lovely humbleness afterwards, most precious grace; but at the same time we have in his history solemn warning as to the result in

blessing of faith being too strong for the faith through which it came.

The only safety for us is in the word in Philippians, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”; the going down, down, down, always humbling oneself. David was blessed as much when king, whilst humble, as when an outcast he was hunted by Saul, like a partridge in the mountains.

In these “last words of David,” as we have seen, there is deep consciousness of the failure and ruin, “My house be not so with God.” Where did the heart of David find rest amidst it all? In this, “Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.”

Where does the church find its comfort, resource, and joy, upon the perception of ruin, when, in looking upon its present state, it has to say, “Not so with God”? And is there a single heart, having the Spirit of God in it, that does not feel thus, as not satisfied with any honour now resting upon the house of Christ? Is there one not bowed down at the condition of Christ’s house, looked at in what way you please? Is it such as can give joy and gladness, or has not one to say, “Not so with God”?

Well, we should have sorrow and humiliation at this, though all turns to practical comfort as to the end; for David’s house shall yet be glorified in the Person of Christ, in the midst of the nation now “scattered and peeled”; and we shall be along with Him in His glory, as the head of His body, the church. There is “a covenant, ordered in all things and sure,” in which we stand, an everlasting covenant, a covenant established before the

foundation of the world; and this we need to sustain our souls.

But is it the effect of having the assurance of that covenant to make us content with the ruin, satisfied with the want of honour now given to Christ's house? When David felt all the ruin of his own house, although he could still say, I have a covenant, ordered in all things and sure, could he be content and happy? Impossible! It was David's feeling about David's house. So should it be with us. If we have the Spirit of Christ, there will be grief and sorrow of heart, because the house is not so with God; we shall say, after all the manifestation of Christ's honour and glory in the day of His appearing is revealed to us as an assured thing, what I have to seek is His glory now. So will there be sorrow of heart at His present dishonour.

It is a most terrible thing to say, The covenant makes all things secure for me for ever, and therefore I do not care for Christ's glory now; it is just saying, Christ's glory may go for nothing. This is practically antinomianism as much in the church, as the making the grace of God a cloak for licentiousness is antinomianism in an individual, though not so tangible.

Still, amidst all the ruin around us, it is a comfort to know that that which is before us is blessing. We need, for the sustainment of our souls, what is presented to us as our hope, the coming of the Lord. This it is which really brightens up our hearts. It is most important for us practically to have that upon which our hearts can rest, as a sphere and scene of blessing amidst our present trials. Where will you find the manifestation of happy affection in an individual? It will be in the one

who can turn to a home where those happy affections are in exercise. And so with us as Christians: it is most important that we should have a full unhindered sphere where our affections may be called forth, and all our associations be pure and happy. Where is there the man who, being always occupied in cleaning that which is dirty, does not get a little dirty himself? I want to have my soul sometimes undividedly occupied with what is good; it must centre in God. But He has not shut Himself up! Being love, He has come as it were out of Himself and flowed forth in the communication of love. We should seek to have our associations in that sphere where God becomes the centre of communicated blessing.

It is when God shall have put all things under the Lord Jesus Christ, as the one that is “just, ruling in the fear of Jehovah,” when the power of evil shall be set aside, the men of Belial be “all of them as thorns thrust away,” at the revelation of Jesus Christ, that the thoughts of the Lord’s mind may be exhibited.

Then, too, man is set as the head and centre of all this blessing, man as the executor—the Lord Jesus Christ. Man has failed in every dispensation of blessing from the hand of God; left to himself, after he has seen the glory, he will fail. But God’s heart rests on the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the unfailing Man, as the centre of all the blessing. It is when He, the great Melchisedec Priest, comes down out of heaven from God, that the fulness of the blessing will shine forth. There is that which is from heaven now, but it is the Spirit which makes us cry, as conscious of all the disorder here, “not so with God! “Then there will be an ordered state of blessing in this world, a time when the

Orderer of blessing, and the Communicator of blessing comes down from God. This is the great character of "that day," blessing according to God's mind coming down from heaven in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everything takes its place, then, in reference to its relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If the church is the bride of Christ, the church takes its place in its proper relationship to Him as such. So again with Israel it is the same, "He that ruleth must be just, ruling in the fear of Jehovah; and he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain." "Behold the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is the name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness," Jer. 23:5-25. But if He shall reign, we shall reign with Him, as the wife, associated in His glory. Israel will be blessed under Him as their king; but still He is "the head of his body, the church, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

So too the Gentiles. Israel will then be the centre of the blessing on earth, yet "in him shall the Gentiles trust." "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse which will stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious," Isa. 11:10. "All nations shall call him blessed," Ps. 72:17.

And further, "All things were created by him and for him." He is a "faithful Creator": this too is a sphere of

blessing which He is to reconcile to Himself, in which His power is to be manifested. Dominion is already put into His hands, “all power is given unto me in heaven and earth”; but the power is not as yet applied. “We see not yet all things put under him.”

It is not for us to be looking for blessing here, apart from the future manifestation of Him in whom the blessing comes, in the “morning without clouds.” Until the power of evil is set aside, the effect of the energy of the Spirit is to make-us groan and suffer in proportion to it. Our groaning, as saints, should ever be that of the Spirit because of holiness of mind, as amidst the evil, and not on account of our own evil. So was it with Jesus: He groaned because of holy affections, and not because of unholy. Until the power of evil is set aside, the greater the energy of the Spirit, the more is the individual in whom it is manifested exposed to the fury of Satan.

These “men of Belial” too, the saint has to do with them. The soft hand of grace cannot touch them; “they shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.” Tares have sprung up among the wheat; Matt. 13. Grace cannot take the tares out of the field, grace does not turn the tares into wheat! They must be “let alone until the harvest.” Then they are to be gathered together in bundles to be burned.

There was no reckoning in David, of setting the house in order again, when it had failed! He was looking for the “morning without clouds,” when there would be full blessing. So it should be with us. Take Israel, the

church, David, whatever it may be, all have failed; the "house is not so with God." Man has failed—must fail. Paul had to say, "no man stood with me, but all men forsook me; notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." God must be the centre of our blessing. We feel that we need something: the bright energy of faith realises God; not the increased outpouring of the Spirit because of our faithfulness, but God's faithfulness in spite of our failure. "If we believe not, he remaineth faithful, he cannot deny himself." But it is a good thing for us, not only to be able to say, "God is faithful," but to have our affections unfolded and exercised in a sphere where all is perfect blessing, to have them engaged with those things which satisfy His heart. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him; but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." That which the Holy Ghost reveals unto us is the display and character of the glory in heaven and earth, which the Lord Jesus Christ will be the centre and displayer of by-and-by, when He comes again. This is a sphere of joy, comfort, and rest for us. Affections raised by the Spirit of God never can get their rest until they find it where His own heart rests. Here is their centre, their sphere, and their rest, the glory of Jesus.

The practical effect of all this upon our hearts and consciences is to throw us into the first part of the history of David. Be it in what it may, if we are faithful in singleness of eye in the camp of Saul, we shall soon find ourselves in the cave of Adullam, taking, as the portion of our souls, fellowship in Christ's sufferings. It is there

we shall have all the unfoldings of those internal affections, those secret affections of heart, which were in David when humble. It was when David was a partaker beforehand of the sufferings and afflictions of Christ in the cave of Adullam, hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, that he was compassed about with songs of deliverance.

The Lord give us singleness of eye, and in the power of His resurrection to have fellowship with His sufferings.

9 It was righteous power, for God had set him in it j but not rightly used.

10 Saul had slain the priests; but Abiathar, one of the sons of Abimelech, escaped, and fled after David; and, in verse 5, we find Gad, the prophet of the Lord, mentioned as also being there.

11 When about to bring back the ark in the desire to build Jehovah’s house, we see him going to the Philistine, the world, for help.

The Heart Of Christ About His Own, Poured Forth Into The Heart Of The Father

The Substance Of A Discourse On John 17

There is no chapter in the Bible which traces more, as a whole, the position of the Christian, and what Christ is for him. I do not say that it states such or such circumstances in which the Christian may be found, but all He is Himself in the presence of God, and how He has introduced us into that position.

You know that Christ Himself says, “I am no more in the world,” v. 11. He views His position in the face of God and in the face of the world; He sets the Christian in the same position where He is in the face of God and in the face of the world, and He lays the foundation of all that. I do not explain at this time all that might be said on the chapter, because it contains a very great number of important truths. I will confine myself to developing some of them, which will make us understand how Christ presents Himself to us, and presents us to God. There is this grand thought, that Jesus is the source of everything for us. He takes it up from the Father.

We may consider Jesus in two ways: either as accomplishing certain promises (for example, those made to Abraham), or, moreover, as son of David; but He is, on the other hand, a source of life, coming from the Father (accomplishing the promise made in Him before the world was). And it is thus that the Lord Jesus is presented in this gospel.

It is not only as accomplishing certain promises, which besides is very precious, but which is far from being all He is for us. He is the Son of the Father, the Word in whom is life, according to that which is said in the first chapter of this gospel: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth… And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” There is what He is. John says, This is the Word that has been made flesh, and we have received of His fulness, and grace for grace. The Gospel of John, having developed His history here below under this relationship, presents Him to us in this chapter at the close of His life; and He, being grace and truth, come forth from the bosom of the Father and ready to return to Him, gives the Father an account of all He has done.

There is something very special in the chapter. It is the only one which admits us to these wondrous conversations. It relates to us, not only what the Lord says to men, but what He says to His Father, while we hearken to Him. It is not trust merely, but confidence. We are here hearkening to Jesus, who is giving account of all to the Father.

“I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” He gives account of all. He pours forth His heart about His own into the heart of the Father. It is the most intimate relation in which one could be, and wherein He has placed us. Christ the Son has satisfied the Father. He gives account to the Father of all that work of grace, whereof He Himself is the representative.

We find, in this chapter, the most intimate relationship between Him and His Father, and through Him with the Father between us and Himself. We find therein the basis on which to found our hope. In the preceding chapters He had spoken to His disciples of various circumstances; but now the time is come when all which would bring immediate relations between God and us was about to have its course. As regards men, His work was finished. All that the second Adam had to accomplish is accomplished in His Person. All the evil introduced from the creation by the fall of the first Adam has been but the occasion of what the Second came to accomplish. He was from heaven, and He is come, from His Father, to establish all the relations between God and us; and He places Himself before Him according to the basis established for what the Second man had to do. God does His own work. He would have a man for Himself in the place of the first Adam, and Christ perfectly fulfilled this end. It is the Second man who acts in the very circumstances into which the first Adam had plunged us; and it is not on what we have done, but on what God has done, that this basis is established. It is well to understand that our relations are based on what has been accomplished by God's Man. So far there had been on our side but sin and folly: what Christ did was the perfection of wisdom, purity, and obedience.

The hour was come for proving if man could present himself before God, if this new Man Jesus could stand before God. And He can do so. He can lift up His eyes to heaven. And, instead of beholding the cherubim, who barred the entrance of Eden in a terrestrial paradise wherein Adam had failed, and whence he had been cast out (Gen. 3:24), He can look on high and return whence

He had come in grace, saying, “I have glorified thee on earth,” v. 4. He could lift His eyes to that heaven whence He had descended, and the imprint of which He had borne all His life. “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee; as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. [Behold, I take a place before thee, in glory, to glorify thee on high, as I have already done on the earth.]” v. 1, 2. We see that He always speaks in complete humiliation. I speak of the place that He not only has acquired, but that He has made for Himself. If man had been innocent, he would have had his place in Eden. But that a man should make his place in heaven before God, as Christ did, and did it for us, such a thing existed not yet, save in the mind of God. A man, who has the life of God, and has made His place by the work that He has accomplished—there is a new existence. And this is what is remarkable—that He takes the glory as a given glory, keeping His place as man, though Son; He places Himself with His own while He is their Head on the same level with them—as receiving all from the Father. He takes His place in the glory with the Father for ever. As God has given Him authority over all flesh, He takes His place as Head, to give life to all those whom the Father has given Him; Himself thus receiving all from the Father. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

The righteousness of man is no longer the question: here it is eternal life. When a certain lawyer came to Jesus (Luke 10), and asked Him, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” Christ’s hour was

not yet come; as to the ways of God, the door was not yet shut; the Christ was not yet rejected. Jesus said to him, “This do and thou shalt live.” The lawyer had not asked, What must I do to be saved? but to inherit eternal life. Had a man fulfilled the law (though we know that man was incapable of it), he would have had eternal life. But now, if there is not the knowledge of the Father and the Son, there is no eternal life; and if any one thinks that God gives eternal life, and that he so thinks according to his own thoughts and not according to what is revealed to us, that is not eternal life. If a man makes to himself a Bible of his own heart, how will he know what is life eternal? Will it be in his heart? Oh, no; God alone can say, This is life eternal. And if you cannot have it from Jesus, there is no eternal life for you. Nothing is needful in us in order to have it. It is entirely a new thought. It is no more sought in man here below, but only in Christ, who has established relations between God and man; and then, when a man knows the Father and the Son, he has eternal life.

There are those who cannot say, I know the Father, and the Son whom He hath sent. But if, through grace, we can say, I know the Father and the Son, we may say, I have life eternal; and what a happiness that the thing is so simply said! To bear fruit we must have life; and what happiness! A whole life need not be spent in order to know this. If you know the Father and the Son, you have life; and he who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself, and precious is the knowledge that the Lord can lay down a thing with such certainty. A soul may say to itself, I have not eternal life, for I do not glorify God. Dear friends, lay yourselves a little aside; it is the Son who speaks to. the Father, and it does not

become you to place yourself between them with your wretched thoughts. In what the Son says to the Father: “I have glorified thee on the earth,” and there is nothing that thou canst require, but that I have performed. Where did He find His glory?

God could not rest in man; but He could rest in Jesus. Before Jesus, it was with God as with the dove sent forth by Noah (Gen. 8:8), there was nowhere for God to rest; but when the Son comes, He could say, “I have glorified thee”; and on Him the eye of God can rest. He is daily His delight. Jesus can say, at the close of His life here below (that Satan may hear, that His own may rejoice in it, that the world may know, that angels may marvel at it), “I have glorified thee.”

Behold this accepted Man given from God; the Man who has perfectly fulfilled all that the Father could desire! His glory had not been entire, if one single point had failed; but He can say, “I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do.” (I have nothing more to do, and Thou hast nothing more to exact.) “I have glorified thee on the earth; and now, O Father, glorify thou me with thyself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” There is the basis of all, and of our salvation.

It is most interesting to observe how the Son, though God equal with the Father, and having right to the glory, asks it, because as man He is worthy of it. And He takes this glory in the position of man. Thus we understand how Christ has taken our place as man; as the responsible Man in our position as sinners (though Himself without sin), and thereby, even because He has perfectly glorified the Father, He has acquired the right

to this glory. And in order that, in this position as man, He may be glorified with the Father, having acquired the right to this glory, He asks it, that it may be for us as for Himself. He humbled Himself unto death; wherefore God has exalted Him; Phil. 2:5-11. There is the basis of the whole thing: the Son glorifies the Father on the earth, and the Father must glorify the Son in heaven. He has taken His place, because all is accomplished. The Father has nothing more to require: all is done.

Now, what does He as to us? “I have manifested Thy name to the men thou hast given me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word.” (I place them in my own position, and there it is that they became cognizant of their own.) There was nothing left to be done, and Christ manifests the name of the Father to those that God has given Him.

About to ascend to His Father (chap. 20:17), He says, My Father and your Father. He manifests the Father’s name such as He has known it Himself. He lays us on His Father’s heart, as He Himself is laid there; weaker doubtless, just as a little child is weaker and knows much less than a bigger one, but not less therefore children of their father, no less the objects of care and tenderness. We do not understand all the love God witnesses to us. But Christ says to us, “I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me,” v. 23.

“Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words that thou hast given me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out

from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves," v. 7-13. Thus are we set in intelligence and in truth, whatever the degree in which we realise this position. But, observe this: He was "not of the world." Man, the first Adam, had no place before God, because of his sin in Eden. Having failed, he was going to be cast out into hell; Christ, the last Adam, places Himself in the position of sinful man, to fulfil God's purposes; but He was not of the world, and consequently there was no place for Him in this world. The men that God gave Him are taken out from the world, and He says of them, as of Himself, "They are not of the world," v. 14-16. He sets them in the position which He has made for Himself, and this position is not of the world. He will take the world for His inheritance, but the world now is neither His place nor ours.

In verse 25 Jesus says, "Righteous Father, the world has not known thee." He says, "Righteous Father," not "Holy Father," because it was all over with the world. He appeals to righteousness against the world: the world

has not known the Father, although He was fully manifested in flesh.

The hour was come for deciding the merits of Jesus and those of the world. God had to pronounce for one of the two; for they could no longer walk together. God could no longer love this world where His Son had been dishonoured and contemned; and when Judas went out, and the measure of sin was thus filled up, the judgment of this world takes place, though as yet it be not executed. The prince of this world was cast out, and those to be withdrawn from his power are given to Jesus. “I have given them thy word,” added the Lord, “and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil,” v. 14, 15. Thus He describes these persons: “Thine they were”; and “They have kept thy word.” Observe when Jesus says, “They have kept thy word”; and how have they kept it?

There is much consolation in considering this word of Jesus. His disciples, of whom He was speaking to the Father, understood it but little. Their walk, the details of their connection with Jesus, were most sorrowful; but they had (except Judas) persevered, in weakness perhaps, yet they had persevered. Well, that was all. There were many things they did not understand, but they had kept the Father’s word which spake of Jesus. When, one day, Jesus asked them, “Will ye also go away?” Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God,” John 6:68, 69. They had persevered, they had kept

the Father's word: as soon as the word of the Father has our confidence, because Jesus has spoken it, we are His.

The most advanced Christians need this interpretation of the judgment borne by the Lord on their lives. We may be very wretched, and we find that we all are so, if we compare our state with what we might be. These same disciples, a little after Jesus had been telling about the last circumstances of His life, were disputing between themselves who should be the greatest. Well, for all that, they had kept the word. The eye of God sees the smallest spark of grace. He blows on it and makes it become resplendent; and, notwithstanding all the wretchedness, the weaknesses, and the failures, it suffices that they have kept the word that Jesus has given from His Father. If confidence is there, Jesus says, "They are thine, and I am glorified in them."

They might have said, We have not kept Thy word as we ought to have done; but what they had kept was precious in the sight of Jesus and of God. Jesus always speaks according to the principle that is there. The great matter is that Jesus was the Sent One of the Father; and as to all that belongs to Jesus, to this poor carpenter's son, it is the Father who gave it to Him. The disciples had understood that the Son of God had received everything from the Father, that He was Heir of all things. Well, when Jesus takes this place in the heart, we are happy. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities (Isa. 53): but He is the beloved of the Father. This poor Jesus is but too often practically despised and set aside for thousands of frivolous things, even in the heart of the Christian; but we have understood what Jesus is—insulted, despised, and rejected though He be. The eye has penetrated by

faith through all this contempt, and has seen in Him the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father; and this cheers, because we have understood that therein is life eternal. We have the same thoughts as God. Our desire has Christ for its object, and we find our delight in Him. We say, Yes, He is right: all comes from the Father. They have believed that Thou hast sent me, and that I came forth from Thee.

Such is the extent of the privileges of the Christian of whom Jesus speaks: we have seen how and why He can claim the glory. The Father owed it Him, and He gives it us. But, moreover, all the words that Jesus received from the Father, all the plans and secret counsels of the Father, whereof Jesus (taking the place of prophet on the part of God) as man has received the communication; all the testimonies of the favour and ways of God which comforted His soul—these all He has communicated to us. The glory that He has acquired (v. 22), the words that He has received (v. 8), He has given them to us. It is His will that we should have the same communion of thoughts with the Father, that we should have part intelligently in all His love and all His grace, having communicated to us all that the Father has said to Him. See what a position is ours as to communion, and what support for practice has been granted to our souls! And if the intelligence, by means of which the Father's love is poured into the heart of the Son, be given to us, we may say that we have known that Jesus is come forth from the Father, and that we have believed that He has been sent from Him. This love of the Father to the Son is also poured into our heart to strengthen us, and to make us justly appreciate (which, after all, we never can fully) our identification with the Son in His relations with the

Father, and in the position that He has acquired for us, having glorified His Father upon the earth. It is thus eternal life to see all that the Father is to the Son; this is to know the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Jesus was the depositary of the outpourings of the Father's heart, and that is the place that He has willed that we should have. He wills also that we should know the glory that belongs to Him, being with Him where He is: we who have known Him in His humiliation, we who have shared in principle this humiliation. "Father, I will," says He, "that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory"—the glory of Him who, though the world despised Him, had been loved by the Father before the world was.

"I have given them thy word, [He does not say Thy words, but Thy word. When He speaks of our privileges, He says, Thy words; but when He speaks of our position in the world, He says, I have given them Thy word; that is to say, the position of testimony by the word which has reached us through Jesus, the word of the Father], and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world." And to whatever degree we enjoy the position of Jesus in heaven, we must also share His position here below, to be hated: it is the practical position of the Christian.

We have seen how God makes a Christian, by separating him from the world in the death of Jesus. At the moment in which Jesus speaks, God had tried all, and He had given up all His trials. It was quite another question now. God would have nothing more to do with the old man: God set up new relations for Himself in Jesus. Are

they firm? They are immutable. He has glorified Jesus as man. God has received His Son; and He having entered in as man with the Father, He makes Christians, according to the principle after which this new Man is entered into the presence of God His Father. The Christian understands the activity of the love of the Father. He is based on this hope; all his joy is in the life which results from it. He no longer knows the old man but as a sinner, and the new man as having immutable relations with God. He knows Jesus Himself as the Beloved of the Father. The word that the Father has given to the Son he keeps, and recognises the Son as the object of His love. And what can we say? Is our happiness on the side of truth? Can you say that you have received these words that Jesus gives us from the Father, and Jesus Himself as the only One that God can recognise?

It was the hour of the judgment of the world, as it was the hour of the reception of the Son. It is well worth our while to consider whether we receive this word of eternal life. Are you placed on this new basis? What a basis! What a position! A position to which Satan cannot reach; an immutable position, beyond all that Satan has been able to do, and whither he cannot enter. What largeness of grace! May our ears be opened to hear all that the Son says to the Father when He pours forth His heart before Him concerning His own! And what a happy position is that into which He has brought us! How ashamed ought we not to be that we know so little of these things, and that we make so poor a use of them! What have we learnt of that which the Father says to the Son, and the Son to the Father? If you were asked, What have you learnt of this love of the Father, what would

you answer? But, on the other hand, remember that when Jesus says, “They have kept thy word,” He declares to us that His grace has placed us there. Look at His disciples: they were very ignorant. But what I have quoted is not to make you satisfied with remaining in ignorance and indifference; it should rather humble us, if we are in the same case. Rather should we be encouraged to profit by this position, in recognising it as ours. “They are thine.” “They have kept thy word.” What grace! How precious is this grace! How should it urge us to seek the realisation of all these things, so much the more precious as they manifest our gratitude; and if we are led in truth, we shall make account of it to glorify Him, who through His grace has so much loved us!

God’s Rest, The Saint’s Rest

Hebrews 4

It is a blessed thing, though in one sense a terrible one (terrible ever to the flesh), to know that we “have to do” with God; v. 13. Yet there is nothing that we so easily forget, or so often lose sight of. The natural tendency of our hearts is to get out of, and then (as the disobedient child, that of the parent whose eye he fears to meet) to dislike and dread, God’s presence. Always, every moment, under every circumstance, it is God with whom we “have to do.” People who are ever looking at second causes are led into practical infidelity; and so is it in measure with the saint of God: if he be resting in circumstances, he loses the sense of “having to do” with God. But whether it be for blessing, or for profit to the conscience, we have alike “to do” with God.

Are we seeking happiness, where shall we find it? where shall we get blessing that nothing can touch or hinder, that nothing can separate from, except in God? He is not only the source of our blessing, but the blessing itself. There are indeed many outward blessings given to His children by the way, and these even the unconverted may have; but the strength, the comfort, the joy of the Christian is this—he “has to do” with God. God is the source and centre of his blessing.

When once we come really to know God, we know Him as love. Then, knowing that everything comes to us from Him, though we be in a desert—no matter where, or what the circumstances—we interpret all by His love. I may be called on to pass through pain, and sorrow, and trial, as part of His discipline; but everything that comes

from God, comes from a source and spring in which I have confidence. I look, through the circumstances, to Him; and nothing can separate me from His love.

Where God is but little known, and where there is not therefore confidence in His love, there will be repining at circumstances, and murmuring, and rebellion. In such a case, the sense of having to do with God will cause more fear than gladness. John says, “We have known, and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

Is it not quite true that we often stop, practically, at the circumstances in which we find ourselves placed, and consider only our own feelings and judgment about them? Now this is a proof that our souls are not living in the fulness of communion with God. That with which we should be occupied is, not the circumstances, but what God intends by them.

Conscience must be in exercise as well; for it is equally true, that in our consciences we “have to do” with God. This is very profitable, though not so pleasant. “All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do,” v. 13. And after all, dear brethren, is it not a blessed thing to know that nothing can escape either the hand or eye of God? What a comfort that He discerns every thought of our hearts that would hinder blessing, or dim communion with Himself! There may be some secret evil (one of the ten thousand things that, if indulged, would hinder the enjoyment of God) working in my heart, and yet I remain unconscious of it. Well, God sends some circumstance that discovers to me the evil, in order that it may be put away. Is not this a

blessing? The circumstance does not create the evil which it excites; it only acts upon what it finds to be in my heart, and makes it manifest. Since I “have to do” with God, I am made to understand evil in myself which I had never understood before, or known to be there. God discovers the “thoughts and intents of the heart”; He could not rest whilst leaving anything there that would hinder our love and confidence, our comfort and peace in Himself. The evil being discovered, circumstances are all forgotten—God’s end alone is seen.

The heart of man naturally seeks rest, and seeks it here. Now, there is no rest to be found here for the saint; but it is written, “there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God,” v. 9. To know this is both full of blessing and full of sorrow: sorrow to the flesh, because as it is always seeking its rest here, it has always to be disappointed—blessing to the spirit, because the spirit, being born of God, can only rest in God’s own rest, as it is said, “If they shall enter into my rest,” v. 3, 5. God cannot rest in the corruption of sin. He can only rest in that which is perfectly holy. And because He who thus rests is love and loves us, He makes us understand that He will bring us into His own rest, into His own delight.

Now let the soul once know what this rest of God is, let the heart once be set upon it, there will be joy unspeakable in understanding that God’s love can rest in nothing short of bringing us into His own delight. There will then also be the full, settled consciousness that we cannot find rest elsewhere. There are indeed joys by the way, but the moment we rest in them, they become, as the quails of Israel (Numbers 11), poison.

Whenever the soul loses practically the knowledge that its rest is in God's rest, the moment the eye is off that which "remaineth," we begin to seek a rest here, and consequently get uneasy, restless, and dissatisfied. Every time we find something on which we attempt to settle, that very thing proves but a new source of trouble and conflict to us, a new source of exercise and weariness of heart. God loves us too well to let us rest here.

Are you content, dear brother, to have or seek your rest nowhere, save in God's rest?

What is the secret of the unhappiness and restlessness of many a saint? A hankering after rest here. God is therefore obliged to discipline and exercise that soul; to allow, it may be, some circumstance to detect the real state of the heart by touching that about which the will is concerned. Circumstances would not trouble, if they did not find something in us contrary to God; they would rustle by as the wind. God deals with that in us which hinders communion, and prevents our seeking rest in Him alone. His discipline is the continual and unwearied exercise of love, which rests not now, in order that we may enter into His rest. If He destroys our rest here, if He turns our meat into poison, it is only that He may bring us into His own rest, that we may have that which satisfies His desires, not ours. "He will rest in his love."

"For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his works, as God did from his own," v. 10.12 This is not a question about justification or rest of conscience as to judgment: that is all settled. "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," Rom.

5:19. There we rest, and there God rests. Again, “By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” Heb. 10:14. The believer has already and altogether come to rest on Christ’s work as to that. He has peace through the blood of Christ.

The point is one which concerns those who are justified, whom God has brought into His family; God is training such, and bringing them up into the full enjoyment of His own blessedness and rest. If I, being a parent, enjoy anything, it is impossible (if I really love my child) not to wish him to enjoy it with me. And if we, who are evil, do this, how much more our heavenly Father! What God desires for us, as we have seen (and He delights to do it), is to bring us into the enjoyment of all that which He Himself enjoys. He has made us partakers of the divine nature that we may enjoy it. The Hebrews were continually liable to sink into the seeking a rest here, in short, not to live a life of faith. The great point on which the apostle insists is that God has not His rest here—that while there was that which hindered the comfort of His love He could not rest. And this is proved by a variety of testimonies. See verses 3-8.

As to their own state, though he says, “We which have believed do enter into rest” (v. 3), it was not needful to prove to them, any more than it would be to ourselves, that they were not in the rest. We read of their enduring a great fight of afflictions, of their being made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and of their becoming companions of them that were so used. They were still in circumstances in which it could be said to them, “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” The exhortations are plainly inconsistent with a state of rest:

“Let us therefore fear” (v. 1); “Let us labour, therefore,” v. 11.

It may seem strange to have pressed upon us at one moment unqualified assurance in the love and faithfulness of God, and at the next to be addressed thus, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it,” v. 1. But God never ceases to warn in order that there may be the exercise of responsibility towards Himself, while we are on our way to the rest. Were justification spoken of, had that been the point in question, it would have been said, Do not fear, and do not labour; for Christ has done all for you. “To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.”

This “fear” and this “labour” begin when that question is settled, and settled for ever. The blessed principle brought out is, that they are consequences of our having to do with God. Because we have full confidence in the love of God, and because we value the rest of God, we fear everything; not only the temptations and snares that are in the way, but every working of the flesh and the like, that would come in between us and God. Blessing is secured at the end, “reserved,” as it is said, “in heaven for us”; but conscience reasons thus, “how shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!” It is “through faith” that we are “kept by the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.” Faith realises the presence of God. Therefore there is this holy fear: we pass the time of our sojourning here, in fear.

Paul, in writing to the Philippians, says, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”; and again, “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead,” chap. 3. Was it that he did not see the certainty of the end? No, but because he saw the way as well as the end and all the difficulties of the way. Paul greatly feared whatever might distract him in his course, or lead him for a moment in the downward path (the flesh, whenever indulged, does this); and then he adds, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk, so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

Where there is this holy fear, the promise made being that of God’s rest, we know the end of the path; but we “labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief,” v. 11. Grace will prevent such a result; but it is that to which the flesh—the working of man’s will—must bring the unrenewed professor.

There is no such evidence of a true-hearted saint as this holy fear. An unconverted man has, properly speaking, no dread of Satan; but, if not quite hardened, he has great dread of God. The saint of God has no fear (that is, dread) of God, whilst he has great fear of Satan. Jesus, speaking of His sheep (John 10), says, “A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not

the voice of strangers," v. 5. There is in them the distrust of everything but the known voice of their own shepherd; v. 27. Above all they fear the wolf, because conscious of their weakness. If any were to say, 'the end is sure, never mind the means,' the sheep would know that that was no true shepherd's voice. Everything that would dim our eye as to the glory, or prevent its being single unto God, however precious or valuable it may seem, has to be watched against, for its tendency is to hurry us on in the downward road. Where the eye is single, the whole body is full of light; and therefore every evil is detected, every hindrance to the affections being fixed simply and undividedly on God.

It is not then from any uncertainty about God's love, but from the certainty of being in the desert, that we are to "fear" and to "labour." The saint knows that this is a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is": bring him into God's presence, and his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, it is made to drink of the river of His pleasures. Redemption from Egypt brings into the desert. If we have not God there, we have nothing. There is nothing in this wide world, or of it, which can refresh the new man, any more than there is in heaven to satisfy the old. Should we lose sight of God's eye and hand, we have nothing but our own folly and the desert sands around us. One may say to a saint, The rest is pleasant at the end—Ah! he replies, it is not enough for me to know that by-and-by I shall be with God; I have rest in God now, I know God now, I enjoy God's presence now, I cannot be satisfied without having God as a present portion, and I exceedingly dread anything that would come in between me and God. While the eye is fixed on God, and the soul is resting on Him, the ways,

and not the end only, are in our hearts, and become to us channels of communion with Him.

Everything, dear friends, proves to us that our rest is not here. Fearing, because I am in the desert with a heart prone to depart from God, is not rest. Having to conflict with Satan is not rest. Labour is not rest. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” Then there is also the diligence and activity of the new man in its own portion. It is of real importance for our joy, that we should be diligent in our own portion. The church needs to know that it has its own proper portion, its own peculiar sphere of labour. “Much food is in the tillage of the poor; but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.” When we are poor in spirit, and are labouring to enter into God’s rest, there is a reality found to be in the riches which are in Christ Jesus, that many a saint has no conception of. Have we not a sphere in which our life has its portion? The men of this world have their own pursuits, they have that which occupies and engages them; and has the hfe of God in us no resources to strengthen it, no riches in Christ to feed on?—Yes, “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle.” We have a sphere in which the divine life communicated to us can exercise its own faculties, and find its own resources. The church has its own joys, its own interests, its own treasures, its own sphere of life, its own field for the affections, its own topics—its own world, in short, in which there is fruit unto God. Have you, dear reader, consciously this portion, and is it the delight of your soul to search out therein the riches of Christ? the goodness that is in God? All that I have yet got of Christ’s riches, is only in order

that I may become the more enriched, a means by which to attain those riches which are unsearchable.

This holy labour, in searching out the riches that are in Christ, keeps us in the lively sense of what is ours in Him, and therefore makes all else worthless. Having the soul fixed on Christ will enable us to resist temptation and sin. It is not so much by thinking of the object that may be a temptation to us, that we shall get strength; it is not in letting our minds dwell on it, even though it be with the effort to resist it. Our privilege is to be occupied with Christ, and thus obtain the victory. Our liberty is to be no longer, and never, subject to sin—a liberty to serve God without hindrance of the flesh. I do not want liberty to the flesh, but liberty to the new man; and that is to do my Father's will. If anything could have taken away the liberty of the Lord Jesus, when on earth (which, of course, was impossible), it would have been this, His being prevented doing the will of His Father.

It may not perhaps sound like privilege to talk of "fear" and "labour"; but it really is so. And because we fail so much in these things, it is also a blessed privilege to know that God searches the heart and deals with the conscience, that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." If we do not judge ourselves, God will judge us. But "when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

Is it not a comfort to the soul that really loves holiness to know that God will come and sweep the house, lest there should be a single thing left there to offend His eye, or hinder us from walking in the light in which He dwells? Grace emboldens the saint 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." What amazing confidence! And God does search us, and that by the light of the word. He shews us the evil by the word. This is the use the Spirit makes of the word: "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," v. 12. We are brought into God's presence; we have, as it were, God speaking to us. He searches my heart even in the sweetest testimonies of His grace: and then, having discovered to me the evil, does He speak about it in judgment, as that which is imputed to me as sin? No! He says, Here is something not in accordance with My love, something that does not satisfy My love.

If we have neglected to judge ourselves by God's word, there may be something more needful in the way of discipline; but, still, it is our comfort and consolation that we "have to do" with God. Perhaps, for instance, we have been seeking rest here, and have at last well-nigh settled down, and found a home in the wilderness. Then God begins to work in uprooting us again; unless indeed He sees it needful to leave us to ourselves for awhile, in order that, by stumbling, our consciences may be awakened.

If there are circumstances that try and perplex our hearts, let us just say, It is God with whom I "have to do"; and what is He about with me? The moment the heart is brought into the recognition of God's presence, all is done—it submits. The soul finds itself in

communion with Him about the circumstances. All is peace.

It is not rest to be searched and tried. Rest, blessed be God, is not to be our portion here. His holiness will not let us rest where there is sin; His love will not let us rest where there is sorrow. There “remaineth a rest “for us, His own rest—God’s rest. There will be neither sin, nor trouble, nor sorrow, in God’s rest. There will be Himself there. And we shall rest in Him.

If we did but know a little more of the comfort and joy of drinking into the fulness of God’s love, we should feel present circumstances to be as nothing. Nay, if we entered a little more into His purpose toward us, we should say, Let Him deal with us, let Him chasten us, let Him uproot us as He will, so that we have but full fellowship with His love.

Oh, let us not be satisfied with small portions of blessing — low measures, low enjoyments; let us press forward, let our eyes look right onward; let us seek, through the power of the Spirit, after the realisation of all that is ours in Jesus.

12 [Such is the true force.—Ed.]

The Call Of The Bride

Genesis 24

In Abraham, as being the depositary of the promises of God to the patriarchs, we find the fundamental principles of the believer. Abraham having offered up his son Isaac, and having received him back, this act gives us the type of the resurrection of Jesus, who becomes, like Isaac, heir of all the goods of His Father. Rebekah, type of the church, is called to be the bride of Isaac risen. Afterwards in Jacob we have the typical history of the Jewish people.

In Abraham we have the principle of man's relationship with God, pure grace without law. Hagar is introduced as a figure of the law coming in. Isaac, raised from the dead in figure, shews us Christ, the Head, having accomplished His work, and being in the position to maintain all the results of the divine counsels.

In this chapter Abraham sends Eliezer to seek a wife for Isaac. This represents the Holy Spirit sent by the Father to seek the church, "the bride, the Lamb's wife." It is not Isaac who goes to look for a bride. No more does Christ return to this earth to choose a church for Himself. Rebekah must leave her country and come to the land of promise. In this chapter we see the features of the Holy Spirit's work, and how a soul is conducted under His guidance. That is what we are about to see in Eliezer and Rebekah.

Abraham, having become old, says to the eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, "Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee

swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell," v. 1, 2. The first thing which is presented to us here is Eliezer, who has the superintendence of all the goods of his master. He is not the heir— the son is the heir. Thus the Holy Spirit has the disposal of all things. He takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto us, that is, to the church. "But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou earnest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again," v. 4. It is impossible that there should be any relation between Christ risen again and this world. Isaac does not go for Rebekah, but she must come to him. Abraham gives directions to his servant. Thus the first thing is to be directed by the word of God. Instead of making further inquiries, Abraham's servant makes ready and goes off to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor, with no other information; v, 9-11.

It is important that we should act in the same manner. Natural wisdom can form a judgment up to a certain point, but it takes the soul away from the presence of God, even when we are doing things according to God. If we begin to deliberate, there is hesitation: we take counsel of flesh and blood. The first thing is to put ourselves in the presence of God; without that there is neither wisdom nor power; whereas, placed in the path of blessing, we get from Him all the intelligence which

we shall need. We observe this in the journey of Abraham's servant.

Eliezer says, "O Lord God of my master Abraham." He does not say "my God." The promises had been made to Abraham, and God had revealed Himself as the God of Abraham. Here the servant shews himself in entire dependence; and we find him in the path of promise, not exalting himself, but acting according to the counsels of God in entire dependence, and not pretending to have anything, except where God had placed the blessing; for the promises had been made to Abraham. For us this blessing is in Christ, and there is the answer to our requests; nor do we desire to obtain anything save where God has put His blessing, namely, in the path of obedience to the faith.

Eliezer addresses the God of his master Abraham, praying him to favour his master: "O Lord, let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also, let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master." (O Lord, thou must act, and I must know by that the one whom thou hast designed to be the wife of thy servant Isaac; the one who will do these things will be the one whom thou hast chosen.) "And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said,

Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man wondering at her held his peace."

Why any doubt? Why does the servant hesitate, since his request has obtained such an answer? Here is the reason. Whatever may be the apparent manifestation of the hand of God, there is a positive rule in the word to which the Christian must pay attention, and which he must not neglect, because of his weakness in discerning what is of God. Faith looks to the power of God, but judges all by the word; for God must act according to His word; and the servant, being in communion with God, ought to act in this thought; and even when there may be signs, he should decide nothing until the will of God be clear according to His word. He must be able to say, This is indeed according to God.

"And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets, for her hands, of ten shekels weight of gold; and said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee; is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bare unto Nahor. She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in."

God had perfectly answered the desire of Abraham. Eliezer, for his part, sees that he has been heard. Before going farther, before even entering the house, inasmuch

as he had recognised the intervention of God in the whole of this business, he bowed himself and worshipped the Lord, and said, “Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master’s brethren.”

We see the same thing in Daniel; he betakes himself to prayer with his companions; and when Daniel has received the revelation of the dream, before presenting himself before the king who had commanded that he should come, he blesses God for having revealed to him that which the king wanted to know. It is always thus when God is in our hearts; we feel that it is He who is acting, and we thank Him.

“And the damsel ran and told them of her mother’s house these things. And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. And it came to pass when he saw the earrings and bracelets upon his sister’s hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me, that he came unto the man, and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels.”

Laban and Bethuel, after having heard Abraham’s servant narrate the circumstances, acknowledge that the thing proceeds from the Lord, and say, “We cannot speak unto thee bad or good,” v. 50. Thus, if in the circumstances of our Christian life we act in entire dependence on God, He will make our way plain, and will even soften our enemies, on account of the

dependence on Him in which we live. Because we have set the Lord before us, He will be always at our right hand.

If I have asked anything of God, and have received His answer, I then act with assurance, with the conviction that I am in the path of God's will; I am happy and contented. If I meet with some difficulty, this does not stop me; it is only an obstacle which faith has to surmount. But if I have not this certainty before I begin, I am in indecision, I know not what to do. There may be a trial of my faith, or it may be that I ought not to do what I am doing. I am in suspense, and I hesitate; even if I am doing the will of God, I am not sure about it, and I am not happy. I ought therefore to be assured that I am doing His will before I begin to act.

Observe, in passing, that God disposes all things according to the desire of Eliezer. This is what necessarily happens to all those who have their delight in the Lord. All the wheels of God's providence go in the way of His will which I am carrying out. The Holy Spirit, by the word, gives me the knowledge of His will. This is all that I want. God causes that all things should contribute to the accomplishment of His will. If, by spiritual intelligence, we are walking according to God, He assists us in the carrying out of His will, of His objects. There is need of this spiritual discernment, that it may abound in us in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." I know not whither He will lead me, but this is the step I must take to proceed in the path in which I have to walk.

Abraham's servant enters into the house. "And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told my errand." Laban said, "Speak on." What firmness of character in the servant! Look at a man who is not decided; he consults this one and that one, when it is a question of how he is to act; and even, having some desire to do his own will, he will seek rather counsel of those who have not as much faith as himself. Paul took not counsel with flesh and blood. He saw that it was Christ who called him, and he went forward.

Eliezer, taken up with this errand, does not accept the offer of food which is made him. He does what he has to do. One secret of the Christian's life, as soon as he knows God's will, is to do his work, to occupy himself with it, to let no delay interfere with it, even to satisfy the wants of his body. This is the effect and the sign of the Holy Spirit's work. Eliezer wishes to deliver his errand. And what was it that was in question? The interests and the honour of Abraham his master. He had entrusted to him the interests of Isaac his son.

And God has committed to us, down here, the glory of Jesus His Son; and this glory occupies us by the Holy Ghost who is given to us; that is, where there is a single eye, in spiritual discernment, according to the position in which God hath placed us. If we are there, there is no hesitation; being in our place, we act with liberty and joy. If I think about my convenience, my interests, about what concerns myself or my family (there are a thousand reasons which are contrary to a prompt obedience), this is to consult flesh and blood. But if I inquire what is the interest of Christ, the thing will be instantly decided. If I think of anything else, I have not at heart the glory

which is entrusted to me, nor confidence in Him who has placed me there. Eliezer thinks always about Abraham who had entrusted everything to him; his thoughts are upon this, as he sets forth before Rebekah the privileges and the good tidings of his master's house.

If our hearts are filled with the Holy Spirit, it will be the same with us. It is very important for us to bear in mind, that God has confided to us the glory of Jesus. He had no need of us; besides, what can we do? It is He who works in us, and we have but to let Him act. It is His will to be glorified in us by the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the same thing we see in those to whom the five and the ten talents were committed. Confidence in the master displays itself in the decision of the servant; as here Eliezer says, "I will not eat until I have told my errand."

This pre-occupation with his master's glory makes him refuse to take any food until his errand was performed. This is to do God's will. He tells Laban about the matter, and how he has been guided, and that, without using any argument, without saying It would be wise to act in such and such a way, but with simplicity committing to God the issue of the affair. "Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord." If, instead of spending our time in reasoning, we were more simple and obedient, and presented things as the Holy Ghost tells them to us, the result would be better. But we often substitute our human wisdom for the commands of God. Often the things which are the most simply said produce the greatest effect. Peter said to the Jews, You "killed the Prince of life." This is what you did, and what I have to tell you on the part of God; Acts 3.

If we apprehend things and present them to men such as they are in the sight of God, the Holy Ghost accompanies the testimony, and the conscience is reached. Thus men think neither of Peter nor of John (except so far as they recognise them to be men of intelligence according to God, according as God had manifested them to themselves); it was God whom they had found or rather who had found them. When God gives us this simplicity, which makes us occupy ourselves with things in the manner in which God sees them, we ought to speak to any one, according to the state he is in before God. If I feel that he is lost, I tell him so simply; and the most simple addresses are the best and the most blessed.

“And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away to my master. And her brother and mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away, that I may go to my master.”

We see Eliezer asking that he may hasten his departure; he must use despatch in this business, so as to conduct Rebekah to his master’s son; and, having accomplished his mission, he says, “Hinder me not.” He does not trouble himself about Laban’s house, and he gives no consideration to his request; he does not stop on account of it. His love for his master makes him consider his orders before everything else.

It is in this generally that weakness is shewn. We spare the flesh and neglect what we owe to God: in reality, we are sparing ourselves through fear of not being

agreeable to others. I have seen men, who are faithful in what they have to say to others, blessed of God, when they speak with simplicity and without hesitation.

“And they said we will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.” There is no hesitation here. So likewise, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, the bride says, “I will go.” She makes up her mind instantly, in the most decided manner, and leaves all; “J will go,” she says.

Now let us examine Rebekah’s position; she had neither the house of Laban nor that of Isaac. It is the same with us. We have neither the earth, on which we are, nor heaven, to which we are going. Rebekah has left everything, and said, “I will go.” Eliezer, type of the Holy Ghost, talks to Rebekah, during the journey, of that which there is in the house of her bridegroom’s father: precious conversation for the soul which needs to be encouraged by the view of these things, so as to be able to endure the fatigues and difficulties of the journey, and not to think of the house and the country from whence they came out! For Rebekah was going like us, across the desert; and Eliezer, the faithful servant, who was leading her, took care to comfort her, and to speak to her of the precious things which are in the father’s house; to repeat to her the greatness and power of the father, and that “Unto him he has given all that he hath.”

For us the servant sets forth the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, who likewise communicates to us all that there is in the Father’s house for those who are the bride of Christ. It is He who takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto us. It is He who leads us into all

truth, while we are crossing the wilderness of this world; and who teaches us all things.

If Rebekah had hesitated, and had thought about the country which she had left, she would have been unhappy: she would have had neither Isaac's house nor her father Bethuel's. To have left all, and to have neither one thing nor the other, her heart, isolated in the wilderness, would have felt itself in an untenable position. But she has left all; and, conversing with Eliezer, she occupies herself with what interests her heart, and raises it above the things which she has now left for ever. And she journeys in peace towards the abode of her bridegroom.

So it is with us now. The Christian who is not spiritual, but rather worldly, has a sorrowful lot; he cannot be happy if seeking after the world. The worldly man has at least something; he makes trial of these passing pleasures, and finds in them his joy, worthless as it may be; for in truth this joy does not satisfy. But the Christian finds in these things only uneasiness, because he bears about a conscience affected by the Holy Spirit. If he wishes to take his pleasure in the things of earth, and his heart hangs back from following the Lord, he is unhappy; he cannot chide a conscience which torments him; and as he has not listened to the Holy Spirit's invitation and has not obeyed it, there is no joy for him. The spiritual things, which ought to have constituted his joy, produce reproaches in his heart when he turns towards them. But we have the grace of Him who calls us, and who leads us, if we are faithful, in an uniform path, for the sake of His name. If we sin, this does not put us under the law; but we have an Advocate with the Father, who intercedes for us; and God, who is faithful,

cannot fail when He is appealed to. “What wilt thou do unto thy great name?” Besides, His glory is involved in lifting us up again; and this is grace. Yes, we have a Saviour who intercedes with the Father for us, and who works to bring us back to the gracious God who has begun this work in us and will perfect it till the day of Christ, accomplishing all that concerns us.

In the scene before us Eliezer conducts Rebekah to her bridegroom. So also the Holy Spirit conducts us to the end and goal. What Rebekah first perceives is Isaac; and Isaac takes his bride into his mother’s tent. Possessing the bridegroom, she no longer takes thought for anything; she thinks no longer of the possessions, but of the bridegroom himself. The important business was to bring the bride to the bridegroom.

And, as to what regards us in the type which is here presented to us, God seeks us in this world of sin: He finds us; He wills that we should not delay to follow Him, when we have said, “I will go” and He leads us into the presence of Jesus. The Holy Spirit accompanies us in the journey to help us, to comfort us, to tell us of the blessings and glory which await us, and to introduce us into the presence of Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom.

This may be modified, as regards the manner, by various circumstances; but such is the effect of the power of the Holy Ghost. The efficacious principle of our calling is that we should freely decide to allow ourselves to be led by Him, to walk with goodwill; knowing that, being in this manner led, we shall arrive at the wished-for end: “So shall we ever be with the Lord.”

May God grant us all this mercy. Amen.

“Peace—My Peace”

John 14:27

Two things are brought before us here. The first is the fact of peace, though there may not be earthly blessing and prosperity, like the Jews, but trouble outwardly; the second is that which characterises the peace. “My peace” is what He has Himself, and the extent of it. Being thus characterised, it implies that they had it not while He was with them. They lacked nothing: they had purse and scrip, etc. He could speak peace in the forgiveness of sins; but this peace, His peace, was not before given to the disciples.

Peace shuts out trouble, as to the realisation of it. It is not peace of conscience with God here, but that which could not be disturbed by the knowledge of God. It is not peace without God, and it is independent of all circumstances. So much trouble as there is in circumstances, the peace could not be secure, if it could be altered by them.

This peace is the possession of such quiet as to be undisturbed about other things. It is peace with God in the sight of His righteousness and His holiness; and it is an absorbing thing. Suppose I am at peace with some one I do not care much about, I may be troubled enough about other things. The peace does not absorb my affections. When we have the peace itself, we may acquaint ourselves with God. The soul, so satisfied with its own peace, desires nothing else. It knows God, and finds nothing- to disturb it in God or out of God. This peace will keep God between the trouble and us, instead

of the trouble coming between us and God. Such is our danger, and such the remedy.

Mark the extent of the peace— “My peace”; and how thoroughly well He knew what He had, that He could give it them! He had been tried, rejected, had suffered; “he had not where to lay his head,” “hunted like a partridge on the mountains,” “the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”; and yet He knew so well the blessedness He had that He could speak of it to leave it to them. There was an unclouded rest in God, and God an unclouded source of blessing to Him, in all His path of sorrow and trouble, so unlike that which any one else ever had. But “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee,” etc., was known experimentally by Him; and was there ever uncertainty as to whether His Father heard Him? No; there was an unclouded certainty. Nothing could bring it into question. He need not put it to the test by throwing Himself down from the temple; this were tempting God.

The two expressions in the verse explain each other; “peace,” “My peace,” etc. “Let not your heart be troubled.” I am giving you my own “peace.” What we have, we know to be His; not the knowledge of what we are with God, but what He is to God. We cannot have peace if we have the thought, When I come to know God, what will He think of me? I must know God in order to have peace.

If the Lord came this moment, would you have peace and be able to say, “This is our God, we have waited for him?” If you have the consciousness of liking anything that God does not like, you cannot be at peace. Even if you have found peace of conscience about your sins,

through the blood of the cross, it will destroy your communion and peace of heart, if you like anything that God does not like. If there is anything not given up in the will, there cannot be peace: if you have peace, then if God came in, your peace would stay.

Peace is never imperfect: there can be no flaw in it. If anything comes in and produces an uncertainty, it cannot be peace. Water in a dirty pool may look clear at the surface, but, if it is stirred up, the dirt comes to the surface; and so with the heart. Christ gives us His peace; and can wrath disturb it? Did He not know the wrath due to our sin? He bore the wrath. Did He not know the sin? “He was made sin,” etc. Did He not know God? He came forth from Him.

How can we have peace? Because He has made it “by the blood of his cross.” He has expiated sin. The question that agitates your heart, He settled between Himself and God, not on His own account, but for us. He was the Son of God. In the presence of wrath He settled it; in the presence of holiness, too, He made His soul an offering for sin. God spent His Son for us; and can He fail to claim us as the objects of His love? He has bought us at an unspeakable price.

He has seen the sin, judged the sin, put the sin away in Christ. Peace is made, peace is given, peace is known by the “blood of the cross.” Is it a thought of mine about my getting this peace? No. He says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you.” He knows what God’s wrath is; what God’s righteousness is; what God’s holiness is; what all His requirements are; and we have the assurance of His peace from His own mouth. Have I earned it? No; He has earned it. Can He deceive me?

What is my warrant for expecting the favour of God? If you have believed what wrath is, you will value the favour of Christ. Christ would rather give up His life than God's favour for us.

If Christ is your peace, He is as sinless for you as He was in Himself. He is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

God’s Dwelling With Men

Revelation 21:1-8

In this part of the chapter we have the end of all things, when the mediatorial work of Christ, even as king in subduing all things, is finished, and He has given up the kingdom that God may be all in all; when the final result is produced in the new heaven and the new earth; when the former things have passed away; when everything is in its own essential blessedness in the presence of God, and we have not only got blessing, but this in glory; it leads us in a peculiar manner to see the way in which the thought and counsel of God have been at all times to make man His dwelling-place. This is not always observed in Scripture; but when God’s ways are brought out, and also particularly His holiness as it is said in the Psalms, “Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever,” then we have the purpose of God unfolded to us to make man His dwelling-place; and therefore we find the goodness and love of God finally displayed.

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” The language is figurative, no doubt; but there is this full and complete effect of God’s own dealing and working in the removal of everything that can create a pang. But there is more in this than that tears are wiped away: God shall do it. There is the compassion that has caused the removal of the sorrow, and this is more than that the sorrow is gone. It is God who has removed all. If the evil is gone and the sense of pain, it is God who has put

them away from the heart. “And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.” Not only has He taken away the evil, but it is never to be any more. That is, there is now full and perfect security and blessedness. All the evil is gone, and all those things too through which man was exercised to bring him to a point where he could really meet God. The love of God takes the place of everything, and, filling all things with Himself, precludes the possibility of evil ever coming in again: the contrast of man’s paradise of old, as we all know.

Then come two great principles in verses 6, 7: “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” First, there is the one who is athirst, and then the one who overcomes. These are the ways in which the Spirit works; and God always answers the workings of the Spirit. Whenever the Spirit acts in producing desires and wants (it may be at first after holiness or forgiveness, and then after communion and enjoying God), they are all perfectly satisfied in God. Therefore it is said, “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life.” It is not merely, mark, the water of life that is given here; but there is given “of the fountain,” that which springs up in the presence of God. What a thing to find! Thus the soul is perfectly satisfied with the fountain of blessedness for which he is thirsting, even God Himself, whom he is rendered capable of enjoying. He is at the well-spring.

The second principle is that he that overcomes shall inherit. Here we find not desires satisfied, but difficulties overcome. It was so with Jesus Himself, as it

is said, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on his throne.” “He that overcometh shall inherit these things,” as associated with Christ, “and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” He comes into immediate connection with God. In the one we have the satisfaction of spiritual wants, in the other the relationship wherein we stand. This is the general thought. Such is the state and condition of those spoken of; but there is another point which deserves to be enlarged on a little more, and that is the personal happiness found in it. There is no longer a Mediator, no longer the need of one; there is no more the need of mercy and grace found to help in the time of need.

When we come a little closer, there are other things that claim attention. We have here, “Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people,” etc. His dwelling-place is with men. It is no more an individual or a national thing. Of course the wicked are put away; but God’s dwelling-place is no longer with the Jews, but with men. And this too is to be noticed, that the church has a very peculiar place.

The thought of God was to be with men, dwelling and abiding with them. Christ dwelt here among men, but it was a short time, and now He is cast out; but that will be another thing. Nor will it be as He appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even Christ’s stay was to end; but not so the dwelling of God by-and-by. Neither is it simply men made blessed; but God will dwell with them. Such is the distinctive, eternal character of blessing; but also the church is to possess it in a peculiar way, already remarked on in this passage. It is

not life only, but the presence of God with men as His abiding-place to reveal Himself and bless them fully.

If we look back at Adam and his dwelling-place, we shall not find this. God did not, could not, stay there. Man was then put under responsibility to see if God could stay there. The question of obedience had to be settled; and we know how it was settled. Man disobeyed and was cast out. The test was the stability of the creature; it was no question of divine work in grace. God, therefore, in no wise dwelt there. But on man's sin He revealed the assurance of the Second Man, the Lord from heaven. As the first man, Adam, had failed under the serpent's craft, the last Adam was to come and destroy his power. So said God when pronouncing on the serpent. There was this revelation; but the world went on so badly that the flood came and took them all away, save Noah and his family, whom God rescued in the ark.

Yet the next thing we hear of the world is that men set about in the plain of Shinar to defy God, centralise man, and possess the earth in their own might and for their own name; just as men will do by-and-by in a yet more daring way, but Jehovah will confound them also, as He did at Babel. Thus, we see, by His judgment, the world ordered into nations and tongues; and the very fact of the existence of different tongues shews that men are separated into nations. This took its rise at Babel; so that the children of men could no longer understand each other. And still there are these peoples and tongues, nations and families. Thus the world was settled then.

But another thing comes out: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham." He said, as it were,

You must have done with all this: it is the world. You must leave your country, and kindred, and father's house. I must have a people in the world. This was the call of Abram. But though we hear of the calling of God, and the election of God, and the promises of God, we have no such thing as God dwelling with Abram or the patriarchs. We know, in fact, that Abram did not leave his father's home at once, though he did quit his country; in other words, he had not done with the flesh. But when Terah was dead, then he blessedly went on as a pilgrim, and God visited him in a lovely way, shewing him His goodness and grace; not, of course, in such spiritual depth and fulness as now, but brightly and beautifully, as in Genesis 17, 18. He was the olive-tree or stock of God, as we read in Romans 11. Still there was yet no dwelling-place for God. He visits and gives him the promises. This was all right so far as it went; and though Abraham's faith failed in Egypt, yet in the main he walked blessedly as a pilgrim. But though God visited him and talked with him, there was yet nothing of redemption seen as a ground-work for God to abide with men.

At Egypt came the question which was to be the type of redemption: so mercy put the blood on the lintel as a figure of Christ. Then the children of Israel go through the Red Sea as the sign of the death and resurrection of Christ. Then we find redemption—the active intervention of God to make good the promises made. We have not now a promise of something to be given, but actual deliverance, as it is said in Exodus 19:4: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." So it is said (1 Peter 3:18), "For Christ also hath once suffered

for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Not our poor vile bodies—they are not yet brought to God; but our souls are truly redeemed. A work has been wrought so absolute in its nature for the putting away of sin, that now there is not a single thing (morally I mean) between God and him who has part in it; and not only is there nothing in us by which sin can be imputed, but we have been brought nigh to God.

Say, are you brought nigh to God? You say, I am hoping to get there. Then you have not been brought there, for He does not bring half way. But Christ has brought us nigh to God. He represents us in the presence of God. The putting away of sin is accomplished, or it never can be, for Christ cannot die over again. The work is done, but also the people are brought out. All that hindered God having them is put away by blood-shedding; but also they are taken out of the condition in which they were and are brought to God, to "walk in the light as he is in the light." And so it is with the believer now.

It is a very different thought to say, One day I hope to come, from saying, I am come. It is all grace: that we know. But now there is nothing between me and God—of course, there is the blessed Mediator—but I mean there is no evil; it is all cast into the depths of the sea; and we are in His presence "holy and without blame." And what is the consequence of this? That God can dwell among us and in us. If you look at Exodus 15:2, you will see how He brings it out, consequent on their deliverance from Egypt, "The Lord is my strength and song and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation." And in Exodus 29:45, God declares that this was His own thought: "And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God, and they

shall know that I am the Lord their God that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them; I am the Lord their God." This is just the language applied to the church. We shall see the church brought out later. But He brought Israel into the land to dwell among them, and He did dwell among them, as we know, for the Shechinah just means a tabernacle or dwelling-place of glory.

We get this immense truth, which we are almost afraid to look in the face, that, when sin is put away and we are brought to God, He dwells in and among us. Just as Solomon said, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," 2 Chron. 6:18. What a truth this is, that God has so perfectly sanctified the people in order to manifest Himself, that He comes and dwells among them! And where was Jehovah to dwell? In Israel; and all nations were to come there and see His glory; as it will be again in the latter day. It was all spoiled and corrupted: this is another thing; but it was set up that He might be inquired of by the nations.

You will find another thing connected with this, that, except the setting apart of the sabbath, the first time holiness is spoken of is in Exodus 15. Every saint had it, of course, in his heart and ways; but it was not brought out before. But the moment they sing this at the Red Sea, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness," the command is, "Sanctify yourselves"; that is, walk in holiness. The great truth comes out that in redemption the person is brought to God. We also find these companion-truths that the people are sanctified fully, and God is dwelling among them.

There is a people set apart for God, and what characterised them was His own dwelling among them. This itself is an immense truth. It is thoroughly followed out in Christianity, not in figure but in the reality of truth, through the true blood-shedding of the Lamb of God and perfect cleansing from sin, and real deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ, whereby we are brought nigh to God.

But now another thing comes in, that where one gets this full blessedness is in Christ: not Christ in us (however true), but we in Him. And you will find this connected with the fact that He is dwelling with us. There is not a spot left on the man that is set apart as redeemed and purchased and perfected for ever, Christ having borne his sins in His work of redemption. The believer stands in all the efficacy of Christ's work. Suppose you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and your sins have not finally and definitely been put away, they never can be; or else Christ must die again, and He never can. But, blessed be God, He has put away sin, as we find in Hebrews 10:11, "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering ofteDtimes the same sacrifices which can never take away sins; but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God." He is not standing, but is set down, for the work is done. There we find perfect cleansing through the blood-shedding, as it was said to Israel, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

But then we find another thing in the death and resurrection of Christ. I have One passed out of this world (of course, in spirit, He never was of it, this blessed, Holy One, but as to His actual presence here). He is gone as man into another scene, as risen, having

passed through the Red Sea, or death, and gone to God as man. Thus we see not only the putting away of sin, but Christ entering into another scene; and now we see not only God dwelling with man, but man with God. Christ has gone into God's presence as the Redeemer, presenting Himself to God for us, and we stand in His presence in Christ. How is this? He sends the Holy Ghost as the Comforter, and our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. We have this wonderful and blessed truth as the result of redemption accomplished and sin put away. We are partakers of the death and resurrection of Christ. He is gone into heaven presenting His own blood. We are cleansed, and our bodies the temple of the Holy Ghost, and thus we become individually His dwelling-place.

It is true again of the church of God, as it is said, "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," Eph. 2:22. Thus the church of God became the habitation of God. This is a wonderful and blessed position, and we have it in a special manner by the Head being in heaven, as the Lord Himself said, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you," John 14:20. This expresses our union with Christ; as it is said in Ephesians 5:30, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Such is the special and blessed character of the church. It is the habitation of God, and will be so till the day it is taken up to be with the Lord. This is indeed a wonderful thing, and shews us what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation. The individual may fail, and the church of God may fail, and has failed, so as to have become the very seat of Satan (I mean those professing to be the church now); but this has not

altered the truth that, wherever we find the true church, it is the habitation of God. It is not merely that life is there hidden as we get in Colossians, but manifested, as in Ephesians; it is brought out. It is the Holy Ghost in the individual man, though His presence may perhaps only be known by a groan. I am not speaking now of how all this has been corrupted and spoiled. This is truth also. But so is this other thing with regard to the individual, that Christ is in him, and he is in Christ. This is true of the church too, if it knows its place. It is more than being the mere dwelling-place of God. We have union with the Head in heaven. We are members individually, we are also collectively the body of Christ. Hence the exhortation, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God”; and therefore, the church ought to be as a city set on a hill.

Thus, we have here two things: first, God dwelling among us; and secondly, and what specially characterises the church, it is one with Christ. But let us follow farther. When we come to the kingdom, we have this union fully accomplished, being in heaven in the body. We go into our Father’s house; not only does He dwell in us, but we have association with Christ—a place in the Father’s house. I can say, the Head is in heaven, and He is going to take me there to His own dwelling-place; just as He taught us before He went up, “In my Father’s house are many mansions … I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself.” Not only so, but we have boldness to go there now in spirit; and He will come again and receive those whom now He is not ashamed to call brethren, when He comes to display His glory in connection with this world, and the heavenly

Jerusalem becomes the dwelling-place of God. As John says, “I saw no temple therein.”

Supposing, in order to explain things, there had been a temple, and God dwelling in it as among the Jews, there He was hidden, so that even the high priest could not go in but once a year; and even then none saw Him. Though glory was there, it was a glory which was hid. It was then in darkness, except what light the glory itself gave. Here “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple.” If I may so speak, His own glory is the temple. Therefore there is no light there; “The Lamb is the light thereof,” or the lamp of it, as the word should be rendered.

Behold the blessed picture of this in the transfiguration. We see Peter, James, and John, men on the earth; Moses, Elias, and Christ representing men in glory, and then they enter the Shechinah, which, I have no doubt, was the cloud which overshadowed them, of which they were afraid as they entered. As for Peter, he was so astonished that he did not know what to say, and proposed to build three tabernacles, where each could preside as three oracles. But then comes the excellent glory which overshadows them, and they hear the Father’s voice saying, “This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.” In this scene we see the three things which shall be in the kingdom. We find here (Rev. 21; the same thing, the heavenly Jerusalem coming down, and we have the purpose of God when all is done. We know that it is the church, for it is called the bride, the Lamb’s wife, and only the church is suited to be thus associated with Christ.

The tabernacle of God will be with men. Not only He is with them, but there is the tabernacle, the church, and He dwells in it. Here is the full and blessed result of God dwelling with men, and also the tabernacle; for we shall have been taken up and given this heavenly character.

It is a great truth that there is even now the dwelling-place of God. It is not only that we have life and are happy in heaven, but here we are the habitation of God. Let me ask, What is the full fruit of redemption? God dwelling in us. And look at the practical effect of this. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," which is the only spring of our thoughts and feelings, so that nothing else can come in. And cannot we understand how holiness ensues? Of course it must, and divine judgment too, as it is said, "Judgment must begin at the house of God"; for nothing that defiles can be in His presence anywhere, and of all places not there where He dwells. Thus holiness is founded on redemption, being intimately connected with God's dwelling-place. You will see how all is founded on redemption. Adam innocent could not get it. He listened to Satan and ate the forbidden fruit, and so was driven out.

A new thing comes in—redemption. The Son of God came and brought the responsibility of man to its full, final, test. They would not have Him. He would not condemn till the iniquity was full; but when they.rejected the Son, it was full. They afterwards despised the Holy Ghost, but at the cross it was full. Then comes in the fruit of redemption, taking man out of that scene of judgment by One glorifying God perfectly. Now that redemption is wrought, the sin is put out of God's sight and deliverance is given, which we enter into by faith;

and those who are now brought to God by the power of redemption are not now as man under responsibility to answer for himself and find he is good for nothing, but through the work of Christ they are brought into the new creation; as it is said, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation,” 2 Cor. 5:17. He belongs not to the old creation (of course his body does; but I am not speaking of that: the man himself does not), but to the new creation, as it is said, “That we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures,” James 1:18. The church of God is such.

We see that God has not done some little good for us, but He has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ. We have become His dwelling-place, and what do I find as to this holiness which comes in? I am not my own, I am bought with a price. I am sanctified to God, and I must bring the heavenly atmosphere to bear on my ways, habits, and feelings, and grow up unto Him in all things who is the Head, and know more of Christ every day. What a character of holiness belongs to the Christian and to the church of God! “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.”

Let me ask you how you treat this divine guest. I am now speaking reverentially of God’s presence. How often do you think of it in the day, that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost? If the queen were to come, and for a time take up her abode with any of us, we should think of nothing else. I am now speaking of the respect which every person ought to feel towards her. Supposing I were to forget her presence, it would be a shame to me, and the fact of neglecting her would fill me with shame and bitterness. But what of the Holy Ghost who dwells in us? We think not of it half the day;

we think of it, if we do all things so as to please the Lord. I am called to walk worthy of this; I must keep the temple pure. We fail, it is true, and then comes in the intercession of Christ. But such is the character that belongs to us. O, if our hearts only thought of it, His presence in us is far more blessed than when God dwelt in the temple! Though not so palpable, it is far more real. Do you believe that the Lord Jesus sent down the Comforter to dwell here? Of course, as God, He is everywhere. Do you believe that the Son came down? As God, He was everywhere, and yet He came down; and so with the Holy Ghost. He did come down, and where does He dwell? In our bodies and in the church of God. And what kind of persons ought these to be?

Where is He, the Holy Spirit? Has He gone and left the earth? No, blessed be God, and never will, till Christ comes and takes up the church, and then the Holy Ghost will be taken up too, though He will not, even then, cease working. But He is with us even now, and will be till then, unless we say that God has abandoned the earth, which is not true. Where, then, is the sign of His presence, the witness that He is here? There are no such things as miracles now, and I do not expect there will be again, except in the devil's power.

But, practically, what are we to look for? We are to see how far we in heart, conduct, ways, spirit and manner, are walking on the earth in the power of the Spirit. Only let us see that all these things are the fruit of accomplished redemption. How could we talk so if we were only looking at ourselves? But the Holy Ghost comes as the seal and value of Christ's work. He produces fruit after, when He comes witnessing to the efficacy of Christ's work. Just as the priests under the

law were first washed with water, next sprinkled with blood, and then anointed with oil, the Spirit comes, not as the seal of the fruits He produces, but as the seal of Christ's work, and then the fruit follows.

And thus it is we get peace. It is by the Spirit testifying to the efficacy of Christ's work. Being convicted of sin, we flee to Christ and submit to God's righteousness, looking at the value of Christ's blood; and then peace comes, the Holy Ghost being the witness and seal. And then the exhortation applies, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption." So it was with the children of Israel. It was not said to them, "See the progress you have made; see you have left Succoth; see you have packed up the dough in your troughs"; no, but "See the salvation of the Lord!" That which distinguishes the effect of redemption is the presence of the Holy Ghost; we enjoy it as the fruit of Christ's work. Is this your case? Do you believe that you are redeemed? You speak of Christ as the Redeemer. What has He done for you? Has He left you in Egypt? He has taken you out of it, if you are a believer, and He is gone into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us. All exercise of heart before we believe is to convince us that we are without strength. And what can we do? If we are really powerless, what can we do but "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord "? Then I can say, I am not in Egypt at all. I have got the journey through the wilderness, and exercises of heart there, and conflict in Canaan when I have left the wilderness, but always with the certainty of being redeemed.

The Lord give us to know that the place we hold on earth by redemption is to be the habitation of God through the Spirit individually, and as the church of God,

and to feel “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation,” and that “holiness becometh” His “house for ever!” God will carry this on till the time of the new heaven and the new earth; and even then He speaks of the tabernacle of God being with men in connection with the place we have got into in Christ. The Lord give us to know by faith now that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost; that we are not our own, but bought with a price!

Dead And Risen With Christ

Colossians 3

If you examine the writings of Paul with a little care, you will find this principle at the root of all his teaching—that we are dead and risen with Christ. It is not only that He has died and risen for us, but that we are dead and risen with Him. He adds another thing; and that is our union with Him, now that He is ascended. “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” These two principles are found here; our being dead and risen with Him; and our union with Him, now that He is on high. When he speaks of union, there is so far a difference that he looks at us as dead to begin with; and the whole power of Christ comes in to raise us. When he looks at people as living in sin, he brings in the doctrine of being dead to sin. On the other hand, if we are looked at as dead in sins, with no spiritual life, then the whole work is of God in raising us out of that state; so in Ephesians he unfolds the privileges of the child of God, from death to union with Christ. Here he lays, as the foundation of his teaching, our being dead and risen with Christ. Thus he associates us with Christ in every respect, first by death, then by resurrection, and, lastly, “when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.”

The difference in the two epistles lies specially in this. To the Colossians he speaks of life, or the new nature, we have in Christ; whereas, in Ephesians, we have much more of the Holy Ghost by whom we are made one with Christ, “members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Here it is death and resurrection and

association with Christ. Indeed this is his doctrine everywhere. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” “And you being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” His constant theme is that, as believers, our entire association is with Christ.

Now I repeat that, blessed as the full privileges are into which we thus come, the great doctrine, which lies at the foundation and root of all this, is the being dead and risen with Him. The true condition of every believer, that which from the very starting-point this doctrine teaches, is the utter judgment of the old man; the sentence of death passed upon it, and condemnation altogether. There is no recognition of the flesh as to allowance or acceptance of it. But when I have found out that the old man is simply this evil thing, then I discover that it is a question of putting it off and of putting on something else. It is not a correction of the old nature, but the having done with it and having something else instead of it. I put off the one, and I put on the other. It is a figure, of course, but the figure of what is most real to faith. On the one hand, I have done with my Adam-life; and, on the other, the nature that I get or put on by grace is the Christ-life. But how can I put off a life? I can put off an opinion or a bad habit; but how can I put off a life? The only way of putting off a life is by dying. But here I am alive. How, then, can it be true of me that I have put off the old man? This is the great truth that the apostle brings before us. After having received Christ for my life (the second Man He is called, the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit)—after having received life from Christ, He Himself being in me, God has appropriated to me all the

value and power of that in which Christ is, and which is in Him.

Here it is more particularly as regards life; but He has been crucified for us, not merely as putting away sins, but “in that he died, he died unto sin once. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” There is this great basis of truth upon which all the apostle’s teaching is founded: that Christ comes, presents Himself to man as in the flesh, and man will not have Him. Man could not have to say to God as a living man in the flesh. But Christ dies for him; and those who receive Him into their hearts now live by Him. “As many of us as were baptised unto Christ Jesus, were baptised unto his death.” Such is the way he answers in Romans 6, where the charge is made, “Let us continue in sin that grace may abound.” If it be said, Christ by His death and resurrection has made me righteous before God, and so I may live in sin, there is this doctrine in reply. The obedience of Christ is obedience unto death; and if you are dead with Christ, a dead man does not live. He strikes at the root of the matter, and says, You have got this justification of life by Christ’s death and resurrection, and you are denying the very thing that justifies you. It is death to sin and life to God; and therefore you who plead for sin are denying the great truth upon which your salvation is founded. If you have died with Christ to all that is in this world, you cannot be living in it. “How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” It is a sweeping conclusion to every cavil. If I take death, as I do in baptism unto Christ, I take it to all that which I was living in—to sin, flesh, the world, yea, to the law itself. The law has power over a

man as long as he lives. Put a man in prison for stealing; and if he dies, it is all over with him. The prisoner is no longer there to be dealt with. The law has not lost its power; but it cannot touch a dead man. And if I say as a believer, I am dead with Christ, my life is over in that sense. It is the same thing as to sin. Obedience becomes obedience to God. Death closes necessarily the connection of the living man with all the things to which the old man had to say. I am crucified with Christ, I am dead with Christ, and I am risen with Him.

On the other hand, there is the positive side: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.” I have received Him who has risen, as my life. Nothing can be more important in its place than a distinct and definite apprehension of this; not only Christ has died for us, but we can also say that we have died with Him. How it cuts at the root of everything that flesh seeks! What can a dead man seek? We are to reckon ourselves dead—not to reason that we must die, which will not give us power; but we are to reckon ourselves dead. Supposing a person comes to tempt me—how can he tempt a dead man? He tells me to come and amuse myself in something. But I say, I am dead; and the reason I can say so is that my life is another kind of life altogether. The old stock may spring up and shew itself sometimes; but I learn to treat the old life as not the tree at all. We may fail to do this, and then it will produce the old bad fruit; but inasmuch as Christ is my life, I am but a grafted tree; I have a right to take that which I am grafted into as the real tree, and have nothing to do with anything else.

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” What are the things that belong to a risen life? The things down here in the world? No. What can a risen man seek in the world? He has nothing to do with the things of this life. That is the position in which He puts us. But, blessed be God, the risen man, supposing we are actually risen, has objects; his life belongs to another world, even to heaven. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.” If I am risen with Christ, and Christ has become my life, where is Christ? Up at the right hand of God. He does not say, You are there; but speaking of life he says, “If ye then are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

Mark how distinctly he here associates us with Christ. He says, Christ is hid in God; well, He is your life, and your life is hid there too. But Christ is going to appear; and when He appears, ye also shall appear with Him in glory. There is complete association with the Lord Jesus now for life, so that my life is hid with Him in God, because He is my life; and when He appears, I also shall appear with Him in glory. It is not union, but complete association with Christ. It is this which gives its character to the Christian, and shews what his life is: “that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal bodies.” It is the reproducing Christ in this world: and we get, in the verses that I have read, the complete description of what this life is in a practical sense. The

life itself is Christ. “Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” But what a truth this is, that, if I am a Christian at all, it is Christ that is my life! It is not the old tree dug about and dunged; that was done with. When He cursed the fig tree, it was pronouncing upon the old stock its everlasting fruitlessness. There was no fruit to be found on it; and He said, “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.” The old man, the flesh, is a judged, condemned thing; it is the second Man, the Lord from heaven, who is the spring of everything which is good or blessed. It is the great principle that is thus laid down. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”

Now mark one thing very distinctly of this life. If Christ is my life, in that sense Christ and heavenly things become the object of my life. Every creature must have an object. It is God’s supreme prerogative not to want an object. He may love an object; but I cannot live without an object any more than without food. This life has an object. The law wanted this; it gave no object. It said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength”; but it told me no more about the matter. It is very blessed in our life as Christians, that, while Christ is our life, yet I am crucified with Christ; and “the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.” That is, I get now an object which acts upon and feeds this life, and makes it grow. “We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” There is the life; and this life has a perfect blessed object which it delights in and

contemplates; and this object the Lord Jesus is, not in His humiliation but in His glory. Therefore what is looked for is, “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” There is nothing accepted short of what is seen in Christ. Where He is the life in me and the object of this life, the point is purifying myself even as He is pure, getting more and more of His grace by thus looking at Him.

We are to reckon ourselves dead, instead of having to die. You may ask the flesh to die, but it never will. We talk of having to die to the flesh, because we have not got the consciousness of the positive distinctness of the two natures. The old man will take good care not to die. But being alive in Christ, I have the privilege and title to treat the other nature, the old one, as dead, because He died. It is never said that we have to die, but that as Christians we are entitled to, and do, hold ourselves for dead; because we have this new life. The person who talks of dying to sin, actually holds himself to be alive to sin. The moment I say I found myself ruined, but now I have got Christ for my life, I can say I am dead to sin. There is never the slightest varying of Scripture with regard to this. That point being thus settled, with the one blessed object before us, we seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. I have got a life formed and fashioned in His very nature, delighting in these heavenly things, causing us to grow up into Him in all things.

But now comes the actual unfolding of this life. He begins with the lowest things and goes on to the highest, and gives the whole principle and development of this life. He says, “Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.” He will not own the old nature as a life;

but he says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.” And if I look at these members on earth, what are they? Gross sins. All these members upon the earth are lusts. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry; for which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience; in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.” But that is not all. He adds, “But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” If I get angry, it is a proof that the will of the old man is not broken. Anger is not a lust; but if you are living in grace, you do not get into a passion. There is the power of a life which does not these things, and which masters that which does them. We find anger and violence in Satan, who is a murderer; corruption and violence in men. We find all the negative parts here. He says, “Lie not one to another.” He is speaking of that which would be produced by the flesh where it is not kept in check. I am to put off the movements of the old nature. “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” We have “put off the old man with his deeds”; but we have also “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.”

Mark here what we are brought into. I have put off the old man with his deeds; and I have put on something. What have I put on? The new man, which is Christ. I have put on an entirely other nature. And what is the measure of this? Christ is the image of the invisible God: and I am renewed in knowledge after the image of Him

that created me. God has created this new man; and what is the measure of it? Christ is the source of it and the measure of it; Christ in all His perfection above is the image of Him that created it; and what the Christian sees now in heaven is what he is to be practically—it is Christ. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.” He is “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” The measure of it is the revelation of God in Christ. If I am looking at a legal character of right and wrong, I am looking at something in my conduct as a man, and this is not the measure. “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.” But am I to be a sacrifice to God? Certainly. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” That is just the very fruit of all that we are. Wherever the power of divine life comes down and takes possession of a man, it manifests itself in his giving himself up to God. The love of God came down in Christ; and how did it shew itself in practice? By giving Himself up to death. “Ye are bought with a price.” Then “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” Therefore he says, “Be ye imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” So again here, “Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any

man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

I must begin, then, by treating the old man as dead. We shall soon feel our shortcomings. But that puts us in the blessed place of being dead with Him, and calls us to shew the power of the life in which we are called to walk. "Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all." If I am speaking of myself as an Englishman or a Frenchman, I forget that I am dead or risen again, and that Christ is all. He is the only object, the only one that the mind is right in resting on and looking at. "Christ is all." Looked at as the object, it is Christ and nothing else for one that is dead and risen with Him, be he who he may. What do I want? Christ. What am I to' follow? Christ. What is the object that my heart has to think of? Christ.

The other truth is this: He is in all Christians; He is their life. "Christ is all and in all." He is in us as our life; and, being in us as our life, Christ lives in me; and "the life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." He is all to me. There is the Christian depicted in a few words. Having positively put off the old man with his deeds, and having put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, Christ is everything to him, and Christ is his life in him. Christ is everything as the fulness of this object, and Christ is in him as his life. Most simple, but wonderfully full! He does not say what a Christian ought to be; it is what a Christian is that we have here. Christ is his life and Christ is everything to him as having this

life. He knows nothing else. We may find our shortcomings, which is another thing; but this is what we are as Christians: “Christ is all and in all.”

We see then how blessedly the apostle refers to this for power and practice. He takes now the positive side—the spirit and path in which I walk. “Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” That is, walk like Christ. Having now Christ as my life, and Christ as my object, I am given power over the motives that were mine before, and things that are around me have lost their force. I speak of what the life is in its character and principles. The one object that the new life has is Christ; that which alone forms and governs this life is Christ; and, the soul of the believer being filled with Him, the things of the outward world have lost their force: his mind is filled with something else. The life that is in him is occupied with Christ. The consequence of this is that outward things have no longer their influence over him. “The eye is single, and the whole body is full of light.” Hence what excites the old man is not working now in that way, and the thing manifested is the effect of Christ as revealed to the new man—the new man living on Him. The apostle puts it thus: “Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,” etc. He does not say, You make out that you are “elect of God, holy and beloved.” He says, This is your place: I want you to live in the consciousness of this; and you are now as such to do so-and-so. Such is the truth of all blessed affections. If I, as a child, doubted that my father were my father, how could I have

the affections of a child? I should say, I wish I were sure of it; but I could not have the full flow of affection that follows from having no doubt about it.

The apostle, then, says, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,” etc. Now I am walking in the consciousness of God’s delight in me. Is there not love, joy, peace in the soul? That is the place the heart lives in: and now I have to put on all these things. But the way of putting them on is walking in the blessed consciousness of the truth of my place in Christ. If a man is quickened, there will be the desires of that new nature, though he may not be able to enjoy it. There are affections and duties which flow from the place I am in. “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved.” Oh if my heart can live in that—in what I am—as elect of God, holy and beloved, I can put on anything then! It flows from the blessedness of the place I am in. If I live in the consciousness of my relationship, in the consciousness of what God is to me, these are the fruits that will follow. The first-named fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace; then there will be long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. But I must have love, joy, and peace first. If I am perfectly happy in God, I do not mind if a person insults me; but take it patiently. I am perfectly happy, and have got my soul in the place of these blessed affections. Hence other things will not have the power to turn me from it. He says therefore, “Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved.”

So with Christ. He is above all: He is the blessed object, elect, precious—the Holy One, the beloved One above all. And He is our life. When I can act as being in this place, my heart is true in its affections. There we are in

this blessed relationship; and we must seek to have the abiding consciousness of what we are before God, that we may, in the enjoyment of this, produce the fruits suitable to this state. Put on these various things which are the life of Christ in this world: “Bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another … even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God [or, Christ] rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful.”

But now, having spoken of its practical character, he goes on to another step in this life. He looks for the word of Christ dwelling richly in us in all wisdom; and he calls us to live in the largeness of heart and understanding that belongs to a person that has this place in Christ. He says, I want to have your heart and mind enlarged to live in these things; I want the word of Christ, this full revelation which God has given to us of His thoughts and mind as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, to be dwelling in you richly.

Let us now stop and ask ourselves, What has my mind been occupied with to-day? What has it been running after? Could you say, The word of Christ has dwelt in me richly? Now, perhaps we have been occupied with politics; perhaps with the town talk, or with something of our own. Has the word of our own heart, the word of our own mind, filled up the greater part of our day? That is not Christ. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom.” All knowledge is in Him, and all practical wisdom. They are distinct things; but if they are real, they go wonderfully together. Christ is the power of God

and the wisdom of God. This, then, is what is looked for; that in this condition there be the unfolding and development of the blessed knowledge of Christ. The Spirit of God takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto us. We live in that sphere in which God unfolds His own mind.

You may mark along with this, that it is not merely knowledge or wisdom of which he speaks, but he adds, “Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” It enters into the affections, because that is the character of hymns and spiritual songs. It is not so much knowledge written down like a sermon, but it is where the heart answers in its affections to the revelation of Christ, perhaps something that I have heard in a meeting when Christ has been unfolded: it is the Holy Ghost raising up the affections in answer to the revelation of Christ that has come down. Then there is the expression of the heart that has received it in the affections of the new man, answering to this in the praise and adoration that it produces. It may not be the reproduction of the same ideas, but it is the adoration of the heart that is drawn out towards the Person that has been revealed.

“Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Here I get the whole course of everyday life. There are constantly difficulties that I find in passing through this world. I say, Ought I to do this thing or that, or not? I am uncertain as to the right course, or I may find great hindrances to doing what I think to be right. Now if ever I find myself in doubt, my eye is not single; my whole body is not full of light, therefore my eye is

not single. God brings me into certain circumstances of difficulty until I detect this. It may be something that I never suspected in myself before which hinders me from seeing aright; but it is something between me and Christ; and until that is put away, I shall never have certainty as to my path. Therefore he says, “Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” This will settle 999 cases out of 1,000. If you are questioning whether you shall do a thing or not, just ask yourself, Am I going to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus? It will settle it at once.

Thus if a person says, What harm is there in my doing such-and-such a thing? I ask, Are you going to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus? Perhaps it may be something of which you will answer at once, Of course not. Then it is settled at once. It is the test of the state of the heart. If my eye is single, if the purpose of my heart is all right, I get here what settles every question: it tests my heart. I wanted to know the right path, and it is as simple as ABC. If my heart is not upon Christ, I shall endeavour to do my own will; and this is not God’s will. There is the constant uniform rule which clearly judges every path and circumstance: am I simply doing it in the name of the Lord Jesus?

But what do I find with it? “Giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” In another place it is said, “In everything give thanks.” Where my heart can take Christ with me, my mind is on God, and I can say He is with me, even if it is tribulation. I have got the path of God, I have got Christ with me in my path; and I would rather be there than in what is apparently the fairest and pleasantest thing in the world’; as it is said in Psalm 84, “In whose heart are the ways of them.”

Thus closes this unfolding of the life of Christ. It begins with the great truth that we are dead and risen with Christ— the judgment of the old man absolutely and completely, and our reckoning it practically to be dead. People have talked about dying to the flesh, and of its being a slow death, etc., which is all nonsense. It is a simple fact that is true already. And if I died with Him, I shall live with Him. It is the power of this that works in my soul. The root of all Paul's doctrine is that we have been crucified with Him, and have died with Him; and it is not now we who live, but Christ that lives in us. Then Christ becomes the object of this life. Having laid that ground, that the old man is put off and the new man put on, which is Christ, he draws the consequence of the blessing in which we stand, and the fruits which spring from Him; and then there is this simple but blessed rule for him that is in earnest—I do nothing but what I can do in the name of the Lord Jesus.

One great thing here practically put before us is this: Christ is all. He is in all; but this is the great thing we have to look to, Is He practically all? Can you honestly say, Though a poor weak creature, notwithstanding I am not conscious of having a single other object in the world but Christ? You find many difficulties—you are not watchful enough—your faith is feeble—you know your shortcomings; but can you, notwithstanding all this, honestly say, I have no object in the world but Christ?

First, the root of all is Christ as the life. Then, we pass over to the outward conduct in the man's walk. And let me remark that, while a person may be walking outwardly uprightly and blamelessly, it may be very feebly as a Christian and without spirituality. You will find many a true Christian, who has Christ as his life,

and with nothing to reproach him as to his walk, and yet has no spirituality whatever. If you talk to him about Christ there is nothing that answers. There is, between the life that is at the bottom and the blamelessness that is at the top, between him and Christ, a whole host of affections and objects that are not Christ at all. How much of the day, or of the practice of your soul, is filled up with Christ? How far is He the one object of your heart? When you come to pray to God, do you never get to a point where you shut the door against Him? where there is some reserve, some single thing in your heart, that you keep back from Him? If we pray for blessing up to a certain point only, there is reserve; Christ is not all practically to us.

The Christian’s Nature And Relationship To God

Ephesians 1

There are two ways in which we may look at our relationship to God; and rightly. There is, first, our coming to Him; secondly, our souls may look at the counsels and dealings of God toward us. Of Abel it is said, God had respect unto his gifts—he came with his needed offering. We are looked at in the flesh. As to my state before God, I could not draw near, unless I could bring Christ as an offering. We must have that sacrifice in order to bring us near. Consequently, in that case our relationship to God is measured by our need. We come near because we find we cannot do without it, and we accept that offering as needful to accomplish it. In another way, the measure of God’s blessing we never know, until we look on our relationships as measured by God’s thoughts of us— by all that which He loves to display when He satisfies His own heart in grace, and by His way of shewing it.

We never enjoy our true blessing unless we see how He feels and would act. I must thus rise above what I am to what God is; then my mind is formed by the thought of what God is. This is what we are called to. We’ must come in by our need, as the prodigal did. Man cannot by searching find out God. There cannot be any knowledge of God in grace by man being competent to know it. There would be no need of grace if he could know God otherwise. If I can claim His grace, I do not need grace at all. The way a sinner must come in must be by his need; in this way he learns what grace is, he learns love.

But when I have got to God, it is another thing. Then He would form our minds and hearts by what He is Himself. I came as a sinner because I needed it, just as a hungry man needs food; but when brought, I have fellowship and communion with the God who has brought me to Himself. The measure is given in this epistle: “growing up into Christ in all things.” It is a wonderful thing that God has called us to fellowship with Himself. It is wonderful to have the same thoughts, the same feelings, as God, and to have them together, all flowing from Him. And we are brought into it by grace, and we enjoy it just so far as we are emptied of self.

First, He makes us partakers of the divine nature, the same nature as Himself. This gives the capacity, I do not say power. The new nature is capacity, the Holy Ghost is power. The new nature is entirely dependent and obedient. The Holy Ghost being there gives me power. In the Epistle of John this capacity is brought out in a remarkable manner. “Every one that loveth is born of God.” He has this nature, and he that loves is born of God, and knows God. Then, being partakers of His nature and by virtue of the blood being sprinkled on us, we also receive the Holy Ghost which gives power.

In order to communion there must be perfect peace as regards the conscience. There is no communion in conscience. I am alone as to my conscience, and so are you. In order to communion, I must have far more than conscience, though a perfectly purged conscience is the basis of communion. We must know that God has settled the whole question of sin. The moment a child of God fails, communion fails; the Spirit then becomes a reprover to bring him back, but there is no communion. Communion is the full enjoyment of God and divine

things, having nothing to think of as regards myself. God can now let flow, into the heart that has a conscience purged, all that He delights in. He loves to communicate what He Himself has joy in. All that Christ is is for us to enjoy. You are called into this place of Christ Himself, who is the Head of the body; so that the delight God has in Christ should flow down into your heart. How rich then the saint must be! But he is entirely dependent on the Spirit of God for power. There is no power to enjoy anything without Him. There must be an emptying from self to enjoy what He gives. The Spirit of God has no place to act where self and imagination are in exercise. It is not the glory, which is at the end, that is so much the object of the thoughts, as the source of it—God Himself.

There is more happiness in the fact of being in communication with Him than in the things He communicates; and I say again, because of its importance, that a soul cannot have the enjoyment of the things of God without having peace, which is connected with the conscience. The beginning of this chapter shews how we are presented to God. It is a test whether the judgment-seat brings any terror to your minds. Does it give you any uneasiness? How does the saint get there? Christ comes to fetch him. He said, “I will come again, and receive you unto myself.” Do you ever think of your going before the judgment-seat being the effect of His having come to fetch you? He sends not for you, but comes Himself for you, because of His desire to have you with Him where He is; to be fashioned into the same image. You are to bear the image of the heavenly as you have borne the image of the earthly. When you are there before the judgment-

seat, you will be with Him and like Him. Every trace of God's unwearied hand, all His patience here brought out —we shall be like the One who is the Judge. You will never (I speak, of course, to saints now) be before the judgment-seat of Christ without Christ coming to fetch you in the same glory in which you are to be.

It is the knowledge of grace, of redemption, that leaves me at perfect liberty; and all my life should be a witness of the enjoyment of this blessedness into which we are being brought. The whole of this is through looking at Christ. He is the first-born among many brethren in the Father's house. We shall be with Christ and like Him in the Father's house. There will be the blessedness of being with Christ in the presence of the Father, loved as He is loved.

That is what we have in this chapter. We are set in the presence of God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are blessed in Christ, and God is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "my God and your God," Christ said. There is no measure of any relationship out of Christ: nothing but condemnation out of Christ. If I have known what it is to be condemned, if I have known what sin is, and how God hates sin, I know there can be no hope for me out of Christ. But God has put away sin. God does not look at my sin, but on Christ. Just as I know my condition in Adam, as ruined and condemned, so I know my place as accepted in Christ. How it throws us out of self-importance, self-dependence, self-glorying! We enter into the presence of God in Him who has perfectly glorified God. He is the God as well as Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is that wrought in Christ which was hidden from ages and generations, and He is gone

back in virtue of what He has done to vindicate the character of God. We enter into the blessing in Him who has done all. We shall know God in virtue of what the Father bestows upon us. The Father brings many sons unto glory, and brings them back perfect through the efficacy of the work of Christ. “Blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ.” None can be wanting. Not an affection of God’s delight but is there. He brings us into His presence without one reserve of the affection that Christ has. We are brought back in Christ: therefore all that Christ has we have.

How He goes on to unfold it! “That we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” He is not content with a mere general account, but brings it out in detail, that we may know it. Suppose I saw a person with an excellent character, and I felt that I could never be like that person, I should not be happy. The fact of the excellency of the person, without the possibility of being like him, would make me miserable; and to have him always before me would be all the worse. But in heaven I shall be with Christ and see Him without the possibility of being unlike Him. What divine inventiveness of love to make us happy—infinitely happy! What God is and does is infinite; and it is so much the better that He will be always above us. We shall have perfect freedom of intercourse with Him. Moses and Elias were speaking with Him of His death, as we know, on the mount of transfiguration. So by-and-by there will be communion with Him of all that He has.

“Without blame.” Released from all that which would hinder my loving Him; therefore, we are made “holy and without blame.” There is the proper joy of the heart—“before him in love”—but no thought of equality. Then

there is another fact. “Chosen in him before the foundation of the world.” Thus we have the fact of His heart having been set upon us in eternity. The soul knows there is a personal love from God towards himself, and the heart delights in that. So with Christ. In Revelation 2 there is the white stone He will give, proof of personal delight. There is this character of individually rejoicing in the love of Christ.

How the Spirit seeks to draw out our affections by all this! He tells us it, and would have us to know it and enjoy it. He would have us know we are going to heaven, and why? He would form our hearts by what He is doing, while bringing us in. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children” (still in Christ and with Christ) “by Jesus Christ unto himself.” It is through Him, and by Him, and in Him I find it. It is as having my heart fixed on God the Father that my affections are drawn out to Him, and all because I am “accepted in the beloved.” God has not blessed angels like this. We are not servants only (we should be servants, to be sure), but we are brought into the confidence of children: ought not a child to have confidence? “We have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father.” Our heart should answer to God’s outgoings of heart in grace; we should reflect His grace: “to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” He has done it all.

But here is another thing to be remarked—there is not a word about the inheritance. I dwell on that as shewing how the affections of the saint are formed. If I speak of inheritance, it is something below me. All prophecy concerns the inheritance; but I am looking at what is above me, and my own blessedness is in what is above

me. Subjects connected with the church, blessed as they are, prophecy, etc., are below. He will exercise us about these things; but let me first get my relationship with my Father known. Do not talk to me of what I have, but what Christ is and what Christ has. My soul must enjoy the love that has given it all. The love that has saved is more than the things given. It is of importance to the saints to feel this in the presence of God. It is not mental power, but the heart right—a single eye—that is the great thing; and unless the soul gets its intelligence directly from God, it never understands the ways and affections of God. His own affections must be known and valued. If I have not got my place in the affections of my Father, I am not in a position to have the communion of His thoughts and purposes.

When we were “dead” in sins, His heart was exercised for us. The sinner is here looked at as dead, not “living “in sins as in Colossians and Romans. In Ephesians, sinners are “dead” —not a movement of life; and God comes and creates the blessing according to His own will. When our souls have known the value of Christ’s sacrifice bringing us to God, we are seen not in ourselves at all, but only in Christ. Then there is perfect rest.

Afterwards He can tell us of the inheritance, and then the prayer is that we may know the hope of His calling. His calling is not the inheritance. He has called us to be “before him in love,” v. 2-6. Then in verse 11, He begins about the inheritance. Now He will shew us what Christ’s inheritance is, and we are to have it too. I must know I am a child, and have the thoughts and affections of the child, before I can have to do with the inheritance. The end of the matter is, that we are brought in to share

the inheritance. The prayer embraces the calling and the inheritance, with the power that has wrought to give us both.

How far are your hearts confiding in God, not only for your wants, etc.; but how far is your confidence and delight in Him for Himself? The heart of a child will delight in the affections of the father. Do your thoughts about God flow from what God has revealed to you of Himself, or are you reasoning about God—Will He or will He not do it? When it is a settled thing with me that I am a sinner, what have I to reason about? We want to be brought to this simple conviction—I am a sinner; and if I am a sinner, what am I to do? Can I look for anything from God on the ground of righteousness? No, when brought to God, I am brought to grace. What He is, is the spring and source of the whole matter. In Christ it could not be otherwise. We stand there now, by virtue of the atonement, in that position which makes the sin the very necessity for God to bless. Christ died for my sins, and God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”

God is going to take us to heaven to be happy with Christ there; but He makes us happy out of heaven first. It is a difficult thing, but He does; and He would have the saints living up there where God is, and where we are going, as being delivered from this present evil world.

God For Us

Romans 8:31-39

In this portion of Scripture the apostle sums up the exercises of heart, and the work of grace; first in these exercises of heart, and then in the revelation of real liberty through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, which we enjoy as redeemed from all that we were in the flesh, from sin and Satan and the world, and from law too. But then, having gone through all this, and having shewn the way by which we, having the Spirit, are children of God and heirs, joint-heirs with Christ, and being conscious of the bondage and corruption which is still around us here, he closes the whole by shewing how, before it, and in it, and above it, and beyond it all, God is for us. He brings out this great truth to shew, not that Christ is in heavenly places, but that He is with us in the difficulties. He shews (and what a blessed thing this is, for by it Paul gets to God Himself!) though he goes into the trouble of time, that, before trouble was, and before you ever were, it is Himself that is for you; and if so, no matter what is against you!

After going through the exercises of soul before redemption and shewing redemption as accomplished, he takes up the great truth that overrides it all and goes through it all; and this is not what we are for God, for we were condemned, and, as he says in the same chapter, enmity against God—not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be—but, by means of the process by which He discovered to me my misery, He has brought out the revelation of what He is for me. And

the conclusion he draws from the whole is, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” And you will find that, in the way in which he looks at it, he takes up every side of the question. He does not content himself with looking at the bare fact, though that is blessed in itself, but he takes up every side.

And it is exceedingly precious, beloved friends, to see the way in which God is for us. Not only can nothing escape Him, but He occupies Himself with everything that concerns us. Just in the same way, if a person were ill, a friend might go to inquire for him to know how he did; but if it were a child whose mother were occupied about it, it would have all her care and all her thoughts, for her heart is there. She is for it, and would give everything she has for it, and would not let you come into the house if you made a noise. Yet that is only a human mother, who may forget her sucking child. At the same time it is the character of that perfect love of God in its condescending character. Nothing can escape Him, and He neglects nothing. Surely we may say, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.” First, I find here that God is a Giver. Well, I say, He has given His own blessed Son. I have God as a giver in the highest possible way, so that nothing is to be named after this. Observe the reasoning too: the apostle reasons from what God is and does to the effects on us, and not from the effects on us or from what is in us to God. If I reason from what I find in myself, I say I am a sinner: God will not have me. He must condemn me, though there may be a little hope. Still I drawn conclusions from what I find in myself, and then, though there may be some true thoughts of God, it is partly

truth and partly mistakes. That is not faith, beloved friends. It is so far true—the soul knows that God is a holy judge; but then the real conviction of sin makes us feel that God cannot have us.

Take the prodigal son. He was converted; he came to himself; he knew his father's goodness; but he immediately begins to draw conclusions from what he was. So he resolves to say, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He thought that this was a more proper condition to be in at his father's house. His confession of sin was all right, but the conclusions he drew were all wrong. This is what persons are doing now. It is perfectly natural and true also, if this were all that was to be known. But they mix up the truth with human notions, just as the prodigal mixed up his sense of sin, which was all right, with thoughts of his father, which were all wrong. When we thus reason, we have not met God; for when the prodigal met his father, he was on his neck, and the best robe was put on him. Till then he never got the father's own testimony to his dealings from what he was in himself.

Just so is the way the Spirit reasons when drawing conclusions for God. The soul may be thinking that it is humble, when reasoning otherwise; but it is only proving that it is not cast upon grace by an adequate conviction of sin. The apostle had gone through it all; and he says, God has given His Son, and I should like to know what He will not give after that. If I have got hold of this—God has not spared the very best and greatest in heaven—I must say, What will He not give with Him? If I have debts, I do not like to look at my books (if I am not honest); for I know what I shall find there. What is there

presses hard upon me; but if someone comes and pays my debts, I am not afraid (when they are paid) to let my creditors see my books. I open them up; and if I find the great amount of them, the more I see of them the more I think of the man who paid them. So it is in redemption. The effect in me, when I see the greatness of what has been done, is to make me think more of Him who is for me; and so repentance goes on growing all a man's life. For the more I know God, the more I see the evil of sin. But first, I said, it is God giving. If He gave His Son, glory comes in as a kind of natural consequence. If I really feel and know what Christ is, the more I see this. Our being in glory with Him is His seeing the fruit of the travail of His soul; and if we are not in glory with Him, He is not seeing the fruit of His travail—that does follow.

But, further, the aposde says, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? "He is for me both about the sins in putting them away, and about righteousness. It does not only say, he is justified of God, but God justifies. So what matter if Satan accuse as he did in Zechariah? This is "a brand plucked out of the fire," says the Lord. Are you going to cast it in again? We can triumphantly ask, Who can condemn us? We cannot, of course; it is absurd to think of it. That which is justification here is that Christ is my righteousness. I am in Christ who has glorified God, and is standing before God. As He said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and if God be glorified in him, he will glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him." The work on the cross has glorified all that God is; and now Christ is in the glory, and I am a righteous man in Him. Not only I have what I was in Adam put away, but "as he is, so are we in this world."

Then comes another thing; for we can expect everything after the gift of His own Son. Nevertheless in fact there are difficulties in the path; still it is the same thing, “God is for me.” But mark here how he changes the term, “It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Why does he change to Christ? Of course it does mean the love of God in Christ. But why not say the love of God? Because we have to do with the One who has taken the place at the right hand of God, after being down here in the difficulties. We have difficulties on all sides: persecution in the family, not open perhaps, but that which is as hard to bear; Christ had it too. You say, They think me mad; Christ’s friends wanted to take Him, they thought Him mad, too. And so the apostle brings home to us this very love of Him who came down: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Here I have found the divine love coming down to get the experience of what we are passing through. I want to know the sympathy of Christ. I do not get this when God is forgiving me. God has no sympathy with my sins; but in trials I do want to know that Christ suffered, being tempted. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Principalities and powers? Christ was tempted by them and overcame them for me; so they are no stoppage in the way. Life? He went through it too. He had plenty of sorrow in it; and so much the more sorrow we have, the better for us. But still He has said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” Life cannot separate me from Christ, for “to me to live is Christ.” Death? This cannot separate me; yea, it will bring me to Him: “to die is gain.” Persecutions? I not only triumph in them, but Christ is with me in them.

In all these things I learn to know myself as an unprofitable thing, and the faithfulness of Christ. I may know a man to be kind; but if I go on knowing him for thirty years, I get the experience of it; not that he is changed, but I know him better. I find One who got me out of the grand difficulty; He intercedes for me now. He does not repeat what He did at the first, but a kind of confidence grows with every day's experience; not that I ever learn that faith is not faith, but that I find Him unchangeably the same. I am ashamed of myself for my want of confidence in Him, and the communication of His grace gives me a familiarity of knowledge of Him (speaking most reverently) and a confidence, a happy confiding feeling. We are "more than conquerors," for we are learning Him our everlasting portion, and ourselves that we want to get rid of. Creatures are all against us, but then they are but "creatures."

God is for me; not here in the love of a sovereign who thought good for me when I thought not of Him, but it is the love of God in Christ—in Him who passed through all difficulties for us, life, death, etc., and for us met outrage, oppression, resistance, and persecution. Now I see that the very thing which would try me is that through which He passed for me, and it is a witness of the love which passed through everything for me—whatever concerns the person God loves and Christ cares for. In this way we have to pass on to the glory, to Christ if you please, in the consciousness that Christ has brought us into it. Else we are like the children of Israel in Egypt. When they passed the Red Sea, that was quite over. They had left Egypt. Redemption brought them out. Speaking of the work as done, redemption is behind

us; in another sense it is not: the forgiveness of sins is, but that is not all of redemption, though included in it.

But we are taken out of the condition in which we were into another, just as Israel was. Though still in Egypt, they were not touched when the judgment came. But this was not all. He took their bodies out too. And so He takes us out of the flesh (I do not mean physically yet, though Christ is out of it in every sense). So the Lord brought the Israelites into a new condition altogether, into the wilderness. There they had the cloud all the way through and the manna. There their garments did not grow old and their feet did not swell; everything was provided by God. They had to gather the manna, it is true; just as diligence is required by us in divine things. Next they crossed the Jordan where conflict begins, and then it is we find that the Lord comes to Joshua as captain of the Lord's host. When He thus comes as captain, the command is, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy."

This is the character of the ways of God. It is not a question of redemption here. He has brought us to Himself; but, having come, that which weighs with us must be according to the holiness of God. Because we are called to fellowship with God, and fellowship means common happiness, common thoughts, common feelings. The Father's delight is in His Son; and we have fellowship with Him in that. Christ's delight is in the Father; and we have fellowship with Him in that. So our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Christ Jesus. "If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." The apostle at once brings the character of God to bear on the person.

Thus the effect of redemption is to bring us to God. Being brought to Him, we can say, “Search me, O God.” For He does search, not that He should impute, but that He may cleanse; and therefore we desire that He should. And then it is a blessed thought, beloved friends, that while He has gone through all my difficulties here, He is suiting me for my place there. In every sense this is true, that, if the soul is not sufficiently brought to a sense of sin and to find Christ everything as regards righteousness, it does not understand grace. The Lord only give us to know (I am not speaking of knowledge now, but) in our hearts and consciences, that we have to do with God. Not as Israel had; for now the veil is rent from the top to the bottom, and we ought to walk according to the light because we have been brought into it. This is what I do earnestly desire for us all, that we may know perfect redemption, and have the consciousness that the effect is to bring us into fellowship with the Father and the Son, so that everything contrary to His holiness may be judged and put away.

Reflections On Mixed Marriages

[The following remarks were made on a particularly solemn instance, where a young sister (converted in 1853) fell into the snare of accepting an offer of marriage made by a worldly man. This she had contrived to conceal from the assembly of Christians where she lived; but a delay, which arose out of seemingly accidental circumstances, gave occasion to a brother's discovering her intentions, and warning her solemnly. She owned the wrong, but persisted; left for a relative's, where she sickened of a violent fever, which from the first she owned to be the chastening of the Lord; and died after three days, His word having penetrated and brought her, not only to entire self-judgment, but to fulness of joy. The details, for various reasons, are omitted.]

The preceding history relates, in all Christian simplicity, facts which shew how God can interfere in discipline to deliver His children from the sad spiritual consequences which flow from a want of faithfulness. A young Christian allowed herself to be drawn into accepting an offer of marriage with an unconverted man. Her conscience plainly shewed her that she was acting against the will of God. But she did not know how to stop at the first step, and, not having at once rejected, as unfaithfulness and sin, the thought of that which was offered to her, she had not afterwards the strength to give it up; and God was forced to take her away from this world to keep her from a sin which she did not desire to commit, but which she had not the strength to

resist. Oh how difficult it is to stop when once we have set out on such a road!

Any one who has closely observed the walk of Christians, and who has cared for souls with a heart in any little measure zealous for the glory of the Lord and desirous of the spiritual welfare of the dear children of God, will not have failed to perceive the fatal influence that the world exercises over them when it gains entrance into their hearts. God only knows, and the one who has suffered from it, by what subtle means, and under what an amiable guise the world often invades the heart of the Christian. But the manifestation of Christ to the soul, and the power of His presence, are never ways by which the world insinuates itself into the heart. Those, therefore, who are found, by grace, near Christ, are shielded from the influence of such feelings, and can judge them and everything which tends to make a way for the world within the heart, or for desires which are connected with the world.

Here we are in warfare with the enemy. He seeks to surprise us when we are not upon our guard; and, in order to accomplish this, he knows even how to transform himself into an angel of light. If we are not near to Christ and are not clothed with the whole armour of God, it is impossible to resist his devices. To resist the power of Satan is not the principal difficulty, for Christ has conquered for us this terrible enemy, but it is to discover the snares which he lays for us, and, above all, to discern that it is himself who is at work. In our combats with the enemy, it becomes a question of knowing the state of our own hearts. The single eye (that is to say, the heart filled with Christ) discerns the wile, and the soul has recourse to the Saviour for

deliverance; or even, its affections being fixed upon Christ, the heart presents no prize for the efforts of the enemy. A heart that is simple and occupied with the Lord escapes many things which trouble the peace of those who are not near Him. Thanks be to God, the troubled and tormented soul finds a resource and complete restoration in the grace of the One whom it has so foolishly forgotten; but it enjoys the fruits of grace through many sorrows and exercises of heart. Yet let it take courage. He knows how to deliver as well as to have compassion.

Now these are the two principles which regulate the ways of God with regard to us. On the one hand, God keeps the heart to cause it to discern His own purpose; and, on the other, Christ intercedes for us with respect to all that may be called infirmity. There are real difficulties along the way, and there is weakness in us, and alas! a will which does not like to be bridled, and which betrays itself in a thousand forms of thought and deed. Our weaknesses, like our will, tend to hinder us from reaching the end of our journey; but there is a great difference in the way in which God acts with regard to our weaknesses, and with regard to our will and the thoughts which flow from it. “The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” God judges our thoughts and intentions by His word. Nothing escapes Him; He is faithful towards us. His word is in the heart like an eye from which nothing is concealed; “all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Do you hear that, foolish soul that would

desire to feed upon the illusions that you love? Nothing is hidden; not one of your thoughts or intentions is hidden from the eyes of Him with whom you have to do. Nor is that all. His word is simple, plain, and clear; it speaks in your conscience: do you hear it? Do you know that when God speaks, you have to do with Him who speaks, as well as with what He says? Will you resist Him who speaks and provoke Him to jealousy? You cannot escape from Him: He has already a hold over your conscience, and He will never give it up.

Will you kick against the pricks? But think rather of the end that God has in view. He might have left you to yourself; He might have left you to fall into things which, if His grace interfere not, may render the whole of the wilderness journey sad and humiliating for you. He might have said to you what He said to His beloved Israel, “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone,” Hosea 4:17. Terrible punishment! Harder than the most severe outward chastening I But our God will not deprive us of the light of His countenance and the sweetness of His communion. For God does not chasten willingly: it is a strange work for Him, as He says; Isa. 28:21. But sin is always sin in His eyes, and He cannot allow it. How, then, does God work in our poor hearts? He reaches them by His word, in order that our conscience may see everything as He sees it Himself. His eye is upon us, upon our heart, and the eye of our conscience is enlightened as to what is passing in the heart by that word which reveals God to it. Is that which you find in your heart the thought of a pilgrim, the thought of one who loves God? Is it a thought in accordance with the will of God—a thought suitable to one whom Christ has so loved as to humble Himself even to death for him?

Stop, poor soul, and ask yourself if you are allowing the thought which occupies you because it is agreeable to Christ, to the Christ who gave Himself for you to save you? He has your salvation at heart; He loves you; He knows what tends to ruin you, to make you fall in the wilderness. He will govern by no principles except His own—those of holiness— those which are the delight of the new man—those which belong to the divine nature. He cannot deny Himself; 2 Tim. 2:13. He desires that you should not incur the terrible discipline which awaits the soul that has wandered. He desires that you should not suffer the losses into which your folly will drag you, if you allow yourself to follow your own will. He desires that you should not lose the enjoyment of His communion, and that the proofs of His love towards you should not be suspended or weakened in your heart. He speaks to you in His word, He judges the thoughts and the intentions of your heart. Would you rather hear Him judge you, that ask Him to deliver you from what is too mighty for you? Or will you say, like Israel, “I have loved strangers and after them will I go,” Jer. 2:25? You know that this thought does not come from Christ; you have not consulted Him, although you may perhaps have dared to ask Him to bless your intentions and to direct you. You know that the word judges what you are still keeping in your heart and what has power over you; you are the slave and not the master of your thought. No, that thought is not from Christ, and, while you allow it, you are neglecting God and His word. Well, you are bringing upon you the chastening of God. God is full of mercy and has compassion on us and on our weaknesses. He is tender and pitiful in His ways; but if we are determined to follow our own will, He knows how to break it. He governs everything, and He governs His

children in particular. He is not mocked, and what a man sows he will reap later on; Gal. 6:7. The worst of all chastenings is that He should leave us to follow our own ways.

The second point that I wish to lead you to notice is the government that God exercises with regard to His children. He warns them by His word, and if they do not listen, He interferes in His power to stop them in order that He may be able to bless them. See Job 36:5-14; chap. 33:14-30. In the dealings of God salvation is not brought into question. He looks upon His children, and chastens those whom He loves. The persons of whom the Holy Ghost is speaking in Job are called “the just.” God does not withdraw His eyes from them, and He says also to Israel by the prophet Amos, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities,” Amos 3:2.

In the Epistle to the Corinthians we see that, when the Christians turned the Lord’s supper into a scene of dissoluteness, God laid His hand upon them. Some of them were sick and others had even fallen asleep (that is, had died); and the apostle in calling attention to it adds, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” Solemn thought! We are under the hand of the Lord who punishes sin wherever He finds it. He is a consuming fire, and, when the moment is come, judgment begins at His house. What a difference between such relations with God, and the joy of His love and communion when one has not grieved His Spirit, and when one is walking under His eye and in the light of His countenance! I do not doubt that a large part of

the sickness and trials of Christians are chastenings sent by God on account of things that are evil in His sight, which the conscience ought to have paid heed to, but which it neglected. God has been forced to produce in us the effect which self-judgment ought to have produced before Him. It would, however, be untrue to suppose that all afflictions are chastenings. Though they are so sometimes, they are not always sent because of sin. There are things in the soul connected with the natural character, and which need to be corrected in order that we may live more in communion with God and glorify Him in all the details of life. What we do not know how to do with regard to these things, God does for us; but there are many children of God who commit faults which their conscience ought to feel, and which they would discover if their soul were in the presence of God.

Jacob had to fight all his life against himself, because God had known his ways; and, in order to bless him, God must wrestle with him too, and on this account also He was not pleased to reveal His name to him. It is totally different in the history of Abraham. A thorn in the flesh was given to Paul to hinder evil; for in his case the danger did not arise from his carelessness, but from the abundance of the revelations which he had had.

Where there is a real affection which acknowledges God and all the relations in which He has placed us with Himself, it is absolutely impossible that a Christian should allow himself to marry a worldly person, without violating all his obligations towards God and towards Christ. If a child of God allies himself to an unbeliever, it is evident that he leaves Christ out of the question, and that he does so voluntarily in the most important event of his life. It is just at such a moment that he ought to

have the most intimate communion of thought, affection, and interest with Christ; and He is totally excluded! The believer is yoked with an unbeliever. He has chosen to live without Christ; he has deliberately preferred to do his own will and to exclude Christ rather than give up his will in order to enjoy Christ and His approbation. He has given his heart to another, abandoning Christ and refusing to listen to Him. The more affection there is, the more the heart is attached, the more openly has something been preferred to Christ. What a fearful decision! to settle to spend one's life thus, choosing for a companion an enemy of the Lord's. The influence of such a union is necessarily to draw the Christian back into the world. He has already chosen to accept that which is of the world as the most beloved object of his heart; and only things of the world please those who are of the world, although their fruit is death; Rom. 6:21-23. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." What a dreadful position! Either to fail in faithfulness to Christ, or to have constantly to resist just where the tenderest affection ought to have established perfect unity. The fact is, that unless the sovereign grace of God comes in, the Christian man or woman always yields and enters little by little upon a worldly walk. Nothing is more natural. The worldly man has only his worldly desires. The Christian, besides his Christianity, has the flesh; and further, he has already abandoned his Christian principles in order to please his flesh, by uniting himself to one who does not know the Lord. The result of such an alliance is that he has not a thought in common on the subject which ought to be the most precious to his heart, with the person dearest to him in the world, and who is like a part of himself. They will have nothing but

quarrels: as it is written, “How can two walk together except they be agreed?” Amos 3:3. If not, they must first yield to worldliness and then take pleasure in it; but this sad result is lost sight of when they first place themselves in the position which renders it inevitable. The Christian is drawn away little by little; he is not in communion with his Saviour, and he can find pleasure in the society of a person who is agreeable to him without thinking of Jesus. When he is alone, he does not think of praying; and when he is with the one whom he loves, though his conscience or his Christian friends may warn him, he has no strength, and Christ has not sufficient power over his heart, to lead him to turn from his way and give up an affection which he knows to be disapproved of by the Lord. He binds himself more or less by other motives, such as a feeling of honour—sometimes alas! by more detestable motives, such as pecuniary interest—and he sacrifices his conscience, his Saviour, his own soul, as far as it depends upon him, and, at all events, the glory of God. That which at first was nothing more than a fancy has become unrestrained will.

There is another remark which the history of this young person leads me to make. The first start of a converted soul, however sincere it may be, produces anything but the judgment of self and the flesh, which, by unveiling to us our weakness, causes us to lay down our burden at the feet of Jesus. We then seek for strength only in Him, and we confide in Him alone. The confidence which a soul that knows and distrusts itself has in Jesus what gives it a lasting and solid peace, when it has understood, not only as a doctrine, but by the acceptance of the heart, that He alone is our

righteousness. But we only arrive at this when we have been in the presence of God and have there made the discovery that we are only sin, that Christ is perfect righteousness, and God perfect love. From that time we distrust ourselves, we fight against ourselves, and the flesh and the enemy have no longer the same power to deceive us.

I do not think that the young person of whom these pages speak had been stripped of self. There are many Christians in this condition, and although we may all be exposed to the same dangers, yet such have more particularly to dread the wiles of the enemy, because they have not learnt how far the flesh deceives us, and do not know with how terrible a traitor we have to do. When we have come to a knowledge of this, although there may be a lack of watchfulness, yet Christ has a larger place in the heart, and there is more calm, and less of self.

Observe how deceitful the heart is, and how it loses all self-command when it departs from God. That poor young girl (when she was getting farther and farther into the slough, on the borders of which she had been trifling, to use her own expressions) asked her mother's friend to do all she could to remove every obstacle; and she, who was a woman of some piety, was surprised that A. should be disposed to unite herself to a worldly man.

How wily and deceitful is our heart! What slaves does an idol make of us! For although we may endeavour to escape the danger, yet we take means to secure the accomplishment of the thing that we desire, even while we flee from it. What a terrible thing it is to get away from God! This young person before she was entangled

through this affection, would have shrunk with horror from the idea of such an action. When the heart has abandoned God, it dreads man more even than God. The God who loved A., and who was really beloved by her, must needs take her away from this world where she had not the courage to return to the right path. God took her to Himself. She died in peace, and through pure grace she triumphed. The Christian, whilst enjoying peace in his last moments, should always feel that it is God whose hand is there. What a solemn lesson for those who wish to depart from God and from His holy word, in order to satisfy an inclination which it would have been easy to overcome at first, but which, when cherished in the heart, becomes tyrannical and fatal! May God grant to the reader of these lines, and to all His children, to seek His presence day by day.

The Prayer In Ephesians 3 Compared With That In Ephesians 1

In Ephesians 1 we have our standing in Christ: this must not be weakened. There must be no turning aside from our place before God in Him. There I get to know that all I was as the old man is for faith gone; I see that I am dead, and that my life is hid with Christ in God. In the flesh there is no good thing, nothing but sin, will, lusts, which lead me away from God. But I believe the testimony of God, and see that Christ died, and that, by death for sins and to sin, the entire evil thing for faith is put an end to. The next step is, that, an end being put to me as the old man, Christ becomes, in me the new man, and I am put in the presence of God as in Christ Himself, entitled to consider the old as done away. This is my place and standing before God. It is not only that sin is put away, but my position before Him is in consequence of this.

Nor is this the only thing; for I know that not only am I in Christ, but Christ is in me. These two things cannot be separated, but they are quite different. The one expresses my standing, the other my state. The Lord Himself said, before He left the world, “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” He has brought me into the standing; and this we have in Ephesians 1, 2. Christ is looked at as having lain in death but now raised, and we are raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Him. There we are; and such is our position as connected with the “God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” chap. 1:17, etc. But in chapter 3:14, it is, “the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ." Again, in chapter 1, it is written, "that we should be to the praise of his glory"; whereas in chapter 3, the prayer is founded on "the riches of his glory," v. 16. In the first chapter God is called the Father of glory. "Here the standing is taken as a settled thing; but we have something further, "that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Here it is state, not standing. We do not ask God to raise us up: that is an accomplished fact and is my standing. But here the apostle prays that something may be accomplished; that according to the riches of His glory, we may be "strengthened with might by his Spirit." The condition of the soul must answer to the place into which it has been brought, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

I know that Christ is in me, and I in Him; but I ought not to be satisfied without the consciousness of enjoying Him. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts "is a prayer as to state, not a declaration of standing. What we have to watch is, not to unsettle the truth of the standing, but to apply the blessedness of the standing to the judgment of the state.

Thus, if you say you have fellowship with the Father and the Son, I say, Come, let us see. I saw you laughing just now at foolishness in the street: is not that having fellowship with a fool? Thus it is one applies the standing to judge the state. And here it is that the advocacy of Christ comes in, and connects the

perfectness of the standing with the state. Can I have a better place and standing than in Christ? I am righteous as He is righteous. My sins are all gone. And what now? I have been brought into the light as God is in the light. But you sinned? Alas! yes. Is this the light? No. But are you going to put me back under law? No! I am going to make you own that you need and have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The condition of the soul does not depend on standing but on present grace.

If a person says, I am in Christ and I am satisfied, it is to be feared, and very likely, that he is not in Christ. As to doctrine, he may be clear enough; but if he really were in Him, he could not be satisfied without communion. "Knowledge puffeth up"; but the effect of being in the light is to make us value not the place only, but fellowship with the Father and the Son (with one another, too, of course; but this comes in by the way). The way it works is this: the very essence of the condition of a soul in a right state is conscious dependence. Now one may use the fact of completeness in Christ to make one independent. Two things are implied in dependence: first, the sense that we cannot do without God in a single instance; and, secondly, that He is "for us." In other words, there is confidence in His love and power on our behalf, as well as the consciousness that without Him we can do nothing.

That is the reason why you will find constant reference to mercy when Scripture speaks of or to the individual. When the church is addressed, grace and grace only is mentioned. Only in Jude we have "mercy unto you, and peace and love be multiplied"; and then, in verse 21, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto

eternal life," where the departure of Christendom is contemplated, and when things were rapidly going on to judgment. We find, therefore, the saints exhorted to keep themselves "in the love of God." This is state again, and it shews that when the Christian profession had slipped, and was slipping, more personal dependence comes in urgently. The moment I let this in, I let all the light in, and gradually my eyes get to see clearly. Christ is that light, and when we have to do with Him, the subtlety of evil is seen. But, besides the light, there is grace and present dependence needed. Let us delight in dependence—that a Person above us should minister to us and care for us.

What should we think of a child with its father and mother, who yet said, I do not like to have anything to do with them? Should we not say, These are not the feelings of a child? You may think yourself a fine man in being independent, but you are not like a father's child.

Again, in Ephesians 3, it is not our being glorified with Him, but that God may be glorified. Thus in verse 21, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus." But this state is produced by Christ's dwelling in us by faith. It is not a question of the standing we have in Christ. This carries full, practical blessedness with it, as it is said, "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Whereas in chapter 1:22, the point is, that God has put all things under Christ's feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. Hence also in Ephesians 1, it is the exceeding greatness of God's 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, etc.; whereas in chapter 3

it is, “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,” not the power which has wrought for us in Christ’s resurrection, raising us up with Him.

When the heart gets this, according to Ephesians 3, it is safer, very jealous of itself, and in a lowly condition; in a word, it is with God instead of without Him. I am perfect, I want nothing—that is my standing in Christ; but if I look for fellowship, I want God every day and every moment. But if I think of standing: suppose you have paid my debts and given me a capital besides, I have got the thing, and want you no more for it. So I do not want God to give the place He has put me in before Himself in Christ; but I do want Him for communion, and if I find an evil thought, I go to Him for grace to get rid of it. Do you want to be perfect in Christ before God and not have a bit of communion? The work is done. If all your sins are not put away, they never can be; for Christ cannot die again: not only a sin-offering has been made, but sin has been put away. This is what I call my standing, in part at least; and it is as perfect as God can make it. That by which God has been glorified is my place before God. The best robe is on me; with me it is all grace, with Him it is His own glory. But are you to be a stoic? Is there to be no fellowship? Not only there ought to be fellowship, but your joy should be full.

Come now, and answer, like an honest man, Is your joy full? No. Well, but that is what you ought to be, and it is what we find in the end of Ephesians 3—Christ dwelling in the heart by faith; not Christ our life, though this last is a blessed truth, but that we may be able to

comprehend all the effects produced by the reality of Christ's blessed presence— His being in us thus.

What an unlimited extent of blessing this supposes! v. 18, 19. When the standing is known, it is but the beginning of Christian fife. If I am saved, I am inside the door; but inside, I want to know something of what is within. First let the soul be grounded in that which is the substance of the whole truth. Then, if a person is not kept in a state corresponding to the standing, he may do worse even than the unbeliever. The devil may make him for a time cast off everything.

Sanctification, Without Which There Is No Christianity

1 Peter 1

There is something very sweet in the certainty with which the apostle Peter presents to us the truths contained in this epistle. There is neither hesitation nor uncertainty. The word speaks of things received, of a certainty for those to whom it is addressed. Their faith was tried, but the thing was certain. The apostle speaks here of an inexhaustible fund of truths which belonged to him; and it is not as one groping in the dark that he speaks of it. These things are too important to be left in doubt; they deserve all our attention: our hearts need it. It is not the unregenerate heart that loves the Lord Jesus. One may be brave and all that, and think that if one's conduct is good, the result in heaven will be accordingly; but therein is no love for the Lord Jesus. And this is the mark of the Christian.

The apostle says, in verse 8: "Whom [Christ] having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Now, there is no such thing as this without the new birth, which is a new life, which has an object which pre-occupies it. It is an entirely new life, which has interests, affections, quite a new world; and without that there is no Christian, because there is not Christ.

We shall now see the two principles laid down in this chapter, and in the work here attributed to the Holy Spirit. God finds the soul in a certain position, in certain relations, and removes it to a place in quite a new state;

and this separation is according to the power of the resurrection of Christ.

The apostle speaks to the Jews of the dispersion (that is, to those of whom it is spoken in John 7:35, those dispersed among the Greeks) in these words: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,” etc. He addressed himself to the dispersed, to the Jews converted to Christianity, to those who are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace and peace, etc. He says this because He is speaking of another election than that of the Jewish people. The Jewish nation was elected after another manner. Here he writes, as we said, to the Jews who had believed on the Lord Jesus; so that sanctifica-tion in them was not sanctification of a nation by outward means, but by the Holy Spirit, who separated the souls from among the Jews to belong to God, and to form a part of the present dispensation of grace. It was not with them as with the ancient Jews, who were separated from the Egyptians by the Red Sea; they were separated by the sanctification effected by the Holy Spirit. Observe particularly this word sanctification; the first idea is separation for God, not only from evil, but a setting apart for God, who sanctifies.

This is what God does in those whom He calls. God finds souls lying in evil. John, on this subject, says in his first epistle, chapter 5:19: “We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness”: and it is very precious to have things clearly stated. “We are of God.” It is not

merely that we should conduct ourselves aright; doubtless, that is well, but the great difference is, that we are of God, and that “the whole world lieth in wickedness.” Does that mean that we are always as we should be? No: but we are of God. One is not all one would desire to be; this will come to pass” only in heaven, for it is only there that God will make us conformed to the image of His beloved Son.

But here is what God has done: He has separated us to Himself, as a man who hews stones out of a quarry. The stone is hewn out of the quarry and set apart, destined to be cut and fashioned, in order to be placed in the appointed building. And God detaches a soul from the quarry of this world to separate it for Himself. I say not but that there is much to do, for a rough stone cut out of the quarry requires often considerable labour before it is placed in the building for which it is destined. Even so God separates, prepares, and fashions this soul to introduce it into His spiritual building. There are many useless matters to take off, but God acts every day in His grace. Howsoever, this soul is sanctified, set apart for God, from the moment it is taken out of the quarry of this world.

The apostle speaks here of sanctification before he mentions obedience and the blood of Jesus Christ. We are sanctified for these two things (v. 2): elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. He takes us out of the quarry of this world to place us under the efficacy of the blood of Christ. The stone is entirely His and adapted to His purpose. Although He has yet to work upon it, the question is not of what He does each day, but generally of the

appropriation to the end God has proposed to Himself. It is the Holy Spirit who acts in the soul and appropriates it to Himself. It may previously have been very honourable or very wicked in its conduct (that is of no moment here); only it will be more grateful, if it feels itself more evil; but as to its former condition, this matters little: it belongs now to God.

To what does God destine this soul? To obedience. Up to this period it has done little but its own will; it has followed its own way, no matter what appearances may have been, more or less good, more or less bad; it is all one. The character may have been weak, or more or less fiery, until, as with Paul, the Lord arrested him on his road: now behold this soul, hitherto filled with its own will, set apart for obedience.

Paul had been very learned in what concerned the religion of his fathers; he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He honestly believed that he had done the will of God, but there was nothing of the kind; he followed his own will, according to the direction impressed by the tradition of his fathers. Never, till the moment that Jesus stopped him on the way to Damascus, had he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Thus, whatever may have been the conduct of a soul before this setting apart, nothing of all that has made it do the will of God. But the aim of the life of a soul sanctified, or set apart, is to do the will of God. It may fail, but that is its aim. Jesus said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." He had no need of sanctification, in one sense, because He was holy; but the aim of His whole life was obedience. Here I am "to do thy will, O God." He took the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men,

and He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He existed only for God; the principle of His life was obedience. He was come to do nothing but His Father's will. As soon as a soul is sanctified, it is sanctified unto obedience; and this is manifested by the spirit of dependence which has done with its own will. It says, "What must I do?" It may fail, through weakness, in many respects, but that is its aim.

As to the second thing, we are sanctified to enjoy the sprinkling of blood; first, to obedience, then to enjoy the sprinkling of blood. The soul, thus placed under the influence of the blood of Christ, is thereby completely cleansed. The blood of the Son of God cleanses us from all sin; it is by the efficacy of His blood that we are separated from this world. The question here is not of the blood of bulls and goats, which could not sanctify the conscience of him who did the service, but it is the blood of Christ, who, by the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God. It is this blood which purifies the conscience.

The Jews, under the law, said indeed, trusting to their own strength, We will do all that thou hast spoken. They undertook to do everything when it was prescribed to them as a condition. But here it is much more; it is the Spirit that makes them say, "What wilt thou have me to do? "It is submission, it is the principle of obedience really produced in the heart: "I know not what thou wilt, but here am I to do thy will." It is obedience without reserve. There is no question here of rules that man cannot accomplish, but of the whole will changed; no more to do one's own will, but to do God's will.

The book of the law was sprinkled, as well as the people; but that gave its efficacy to the requisitions of the law, while the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus gives to the changed heart the purification and the peace which belong to those who are placed under the efficacy of His blood. We are placed there as the Jews were under the blood of the goat of atonement, not however for a year only, but for ever.

As to a soul, then, that the Holy Spirit has hewn out of the quarry of this world, being honest, amiable, kept by the good providence of God, but withal doing its own will—well, God has found it there in the world and of the world, notwithstanding all its good qualities; and He has to put His love in its heart, in order that it may, without hesitation, only care about the will of God to do it. But, thus separated, it is under the blood of sprinkling, it is cleansed from all its sin. That is the first principle; the separation wrought by God Himself, who places us outside of this world, or rather of the things of this world, and makes us Christians. Without this there is no Christianity. God acts effectually; He does nothing by halves, and this is all His work. God does not deceive Himself. He must have realities. He does not deceive Himself as we deceive ourselves, and as we try to deceive others, although we deceive others less than we deceive ourselves.

I would point out to you the meaning of the word “sanctification”; it is rarely used in the Scriptures in the sense in which we generally use it, that is to say, in the progressive sense. It is only three times spoken of in this sense. It is said, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness [sanctification], without which no man shall see the Lord,” Heb. 12:14. “The very God of peace sanctify

you wholly," 1 Thess. 5:23. I quote these two passages to shew that I do not set aside this sense of the word; but it more particularly designates an act of separation, a setting apart for God. If we have not laid hold of this meaning, there will be an entire mistake as to what sanctification is. In the two above-quoted passages, the word has an every-day application. In the sense in which it is used by the apostle in the beginning of this epistle, it is perfectly in the sense of taking a stone out of the quarry of this world to fashion it for God. Sanctification is attributed to the Father in more than one place in the Bible; see Hebrews 10:10. Now, it is by this will that we are sanctified; by the offering made once of the body of Jesus Christ. It is by this will of God that we are sanctified.

1. There is the first thought, the will of God, which is to set us apart (to sanctify us).

2. And the means—it is the offering of Christ.

And it is always, with scarcely more than one exception, which we have already quoted, in this manner that it is spoken of in the Hebrews. Sanctification is attributed to God the Father in another passage also; Jude 1. The Father having willed to have children for Himself, the blood of Jesus does the work, and the Holy Spirit comes to accomplish the counsels of the Father, and to give them efficacy by producing the practical effect in the heart. The soul separated from the world is sanctified by that very fact. There is the old trunk which pushes forth its shoots; but God acts in pruning; and His acting, which takes place by the Holy Spirit, works the daily practical sanctification. The heart is each day more and more set apart. It is not like a vase, because in man it is

the heart which is set apart. Thus, when life is communicated and thereby the man is sanctified, there is a daily work of sanctification which applies to the affections, to the habits, to the walk, etc.

Let us see how God does this:—

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” v. 3. Such is the way He does it. God sets us apart for Himself. It is not by modifying what was bad in us, but by creating us anew; by making afresh a new creature, for the old man cannot be made subject to the law. He gives a new life. If one be not thus born anew, one belongs yet to the world, which is under condemnation; but when God acts, it is altogether another thing. Being born in Adam, we have need to be born by Christ. When the heart is visited by the Holy Spirit, one is begotten again by a life which is not of this world, which urges it to another end—Christ. It is not by precepts addressed to the old man, but by another life. The precepts follow afterwards; that is to say, that the life of which we speak, which is the new birth, belongs not to this world, neither in its source, nor in its aim; it cannot have one single thing in common with the old life. This life is found here below in the body: we eat, work, etc., as before; but this is not what Christ came for. Christ came to make us comprehend quite another thing from the life here below, into which He entered; and that is the rule of the Christian’s conduct. He has for object, for aim, and for joy, what Christ has for object, aim, and joy; his affections are heavenly, as those of Christ.

If the life of Christ is in me, the life and the Spirit of Christ in me cannot find joy in that wherein Christ finds not His joy. The Spirit of Christ in me cannot be a different spirit from what was in Him; and it is evident that he who is separated from this world for God cannot find pleasure in the life of sin of this world, and prefer it to that of heaven. We know well that the Christian often fails in this rule; but this denies not that there is nothing in common between the life of heaven and that of the world. It is not a question of prohibitions as to using this or that, but of having altogether other tastes, desires, and joys; and it is, on that account, people imagine that Christians are sad, as if they were absorbed by only one thought. It is that our joys are altogether different from those of the world: the world knows not our joys.

No unrenewed person can comprehend what renders the Christian happy, that is to say, that his tastes are not for the things of this world. His thoughts rise higher. This is the joy of the Christian, that Christ is entered into heaven, and has Himself destroyed all that could have hindered us from entering there.

Death, Satan, and the wicked spirits have been conquered by Christ, and the resurrection has annihilated all that was between Him and the glory. Christ placed Himself in our position; He underwent the consequences of it; He has conquered the world and Satan. It is written, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you”: if he is already conquered, we have not to conquer him, but to resist him. When we resist him, he knows he has met Christ, his conqueror. The flesh does not resist him. Jesus gives us a living hope by His resurrection from the dead; in this way, and being in Him, we are on a foundation which cannot fail.

Christ has already shewn that He has won the victory; and what grace is here presented to us! Even that of obtaining “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.” This treasure is in heaven. I have nothing to fear, it is in perfect safety. But this is what I fear as to myself, temptations, all sorts of difficulties, for I am not in heaven. This is true; but what gives every security is, not that we are not tried or tempted, but that we are kept in the trial here below, as the inheritance is kept in heaven for us.

Here is the position of the Christian, set apart by the resurrection of Christ, and begotten again. It is that, in waiting for the glory, we are kept by the power of God through faith, separated from the world by the power and communication of the life of Him who has won the victory over all that could have hindered us from having a part in it. And why are these trials sent to us? It is God who works the soil, in order that all the affections of the heart, thus sifted, may be purified and exercised, and perfectly in harmony with the glory of heaven and with the objects which are set before us.

Is it for naught that gold is put in the furnace, or because it is not gold? No; it is to purify it. God, by trials, takes out of our hearts that which is impure, in order that, when the glory arrives, we may enjoy it.

Let us see a little what the apostle says on this subject. “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 which perisheth, though it be

tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." What are we about then, as the process of sanctification is carried on? It is that although we have not seen Jesus, we love Him; and although now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

It is there the heart finds itself. Thus, whatever be the circumstances of the present life, Christ is present in the midst of our temptations, and the heart always finds itself close to Jesus, the source of its happiness; and, while saying that His love is boundless—passes all knowledge—we can say also that we have the intelligence of it.

The magnet always turns towards the pole; the needle always trembles a little when the storm and tempest roar, but its direction changes not; the needle of the Christian heart points always towards Christ. A heart which understands, which loves Jesus, which knows where Jesus has passed before it, looks to Him to sustain it through its difficulties; and however rugged and difficult the way, it is precious to us, because we find there the trace of the steps of Jesus (He has passed there); and specially because this road conducts us, through difficulties, to the glory in which He is. Seeing, says the apostle, that it need be, in order that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

It is not only that we have been begotten again, but that we receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. The end of all will be to see Christ and the glory that He has gained for me. He says here, the salvation of the soul, because the question is not of a temporal deliverance, as in the case of the ancient Jews. I see now this glory through a veil, but I long to see myself there. And being now in the trial, I look to Him who is in the glory, and who secures it to me. The gold will be completely purified; but the gold is there; as to me, as to my eternal life, it is the same thing as if I was in the glory. Salvation and glory are not the less certain, though I am in the trial, than if I were already in the rest. And this is practical sanctification: habits, affections, and a walk formed after the life and calling one has received from God.

If I engage a servant, I require him to be clean, if I am so myself. God says, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” And as it is with the servant I desire to introduce into my house, so is it with us. God requires that we should be suited to the state of His house; He will have a practical sanctification in His servants. Moreover, the aim of the apostle is, that our faith be firm and constant; He gives us, in verse 21, full security, in saying to us “that your faith and hope might be in God,” not merely in that which justifies us before a just-judging God. It is a God who is for us, who willed to help us, and who introduced us into His family, setting us apart for obedience, and to share in the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. He has loved us with an eternal love. He has accomplished all that concerns us. He keeps us by His power through faith, in order to introduce us into glory.

He places us in trial; He makes us to pass through the furnace, because He will wholly purify us. It is Himself who has justified us; who shall condemn us? It is Christ who died, or rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, and who also maketh intercession for us: who shall separate us from His love? (Rom. 8:33). Our faith and our love being in God, what have we to fear? We have, in Zechariah, a very encouraging example; Zech. 3. The Lord caused Zechariah to see Joshua the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan! the Lord, who hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee. Is not this the brand that I have plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments (the sin, the corruption of man), and he stood before the angel. And the angel said, Take away the filthy garments from him. And he said to him, Behold I have made thine iniquity to pass from thee, and have clothed thee with new garments (the righteousness of God applied). Satan accuses the children of God; but when God justifies, who can condemn? Would you then that God were not content with His work which He has wrought for Himself? And it is in order that we be holy and unblamable in love before Him.

Can you say, “He has sanctified me,” in the sense that He has given you Jesus for the object of your faith? If it be thus, He has placed you under the sprinkling of His precious blood, in order that you may be a Christian, and happy in obedience. You may say now, He is the object of my desires, of my hope. You may not yet have understood all that Christ is for you, and you may have much to do in practice; but the important thing is to

understand that it is God who has done all and has placed you under the efficacy of that resurrection life, in order that you may be happy and joyful in His love. It is remarkable to what a point God makes all things new in us; it is because He must destroy our thoughts, in order that we may have peace.

There is nothing morally in common between the first and the second Man; the first sinned and drew down the whole human race in his fall; the last Adam is the source of life and power. This applies to every truth of Christianity, and to all that is in this world. There are but these two men. Nicodemus is struck with the wisdom of Jesus, and with the power manifested in His miracles; but the Lord stops him, and cuts the matter short with him, by saying, “Ye must be born again.” He was not in a condition to be instructed. He did not understand the things of God, for to do so a man must be born again; in short, he Sad not life. I do not say that he could not arrive at it; because, further on, we see him paying honour to Jesus, in bringing the necessary spices to embalm Him.

I have been led to this thought because the end of this chapter recalled to me chapter 40 of Isaiah. I do not speak of the accomplishment of the prophecy which will take place at a later day for the Jews, but of a grand principle. This chapter begins by these words: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be

exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Before God begins, He must cause it to be understood that all flesh is as grass.

If God will comfort His people, what saith the Lord? "All flesh is grass," etc. It must begin there. The grass is withered, because the spirit of the Lord hath blown upon it. But the word of God shall stand for ever. Therein was the foundation of hope. Had it been possible for anyone to have obtained anything, it would have been the Jews, who had all; but they were nothing more than the grass of the field, than the grass that withers. When God will comfort man who has failed, in the responsibility which attaches to him, it is thus He begins: "All flesh is grass," etc.; and it is for this reason that there is such a confusion in the heart of the newly converted man, and even of the Christian, if he does not pay attention to it: namely, that the word comes to tell him the grass is withered, the flesh is incapable of producing any good, and that he does not yet rest on this, that the word of the Lord endures for ever, and that the blessing, consequently, cannot fail to His own. Till we cease in our efforts to get good from the flesh, and till we are assured that the word of the Lord endures for ever, we shall be

always troubled and weak before the assaults of the enemy.

The people had trampled on the ordinances, broken the law, crucified the Messiah, done all possible evil. Has the word of God changed? In nowise. God alters nothing in His election, nor in His promises. Paul asks, Has God rejected His people? God forbid. Peter addresses himself to the people: there is no more of them apparently. The grass is withered, but there is the word of God, and He can say to them, You are now a people, you have obtained mercy. Now, we are going to see that this word becomes the instrument of blessing and of practical sanctification. God never sanctifies what withers like grass. He introduces, on the contrary, what is most enduring and most excellent of man into heaven.

The word withers man, the breath of the Lord has passed over. Introduce man's glory into heaven, it is dreadful! This work is painful, because of the often prolonged wrestlings of the pride and the self-will of the flesh; and God does not begin His work by modifying what already exists. Neither can He, because He will destroy it. He can neither require nor produce fruits before the tree be planted. But He begins by communicating a new life, and detaches the creature from the things to which its flesh is attached; and the Holy Spirit communicates to it the things of the world to come, and the instrument He employs is the word, that word whereof it is said, "it abideth for ever." The word, which was of promise for the nation, becomes an instrument of life for our souls. We are begotten by the word of truth, which judges also as a two-edged sword all that is not of this new life. Let us examine the difference between our justification and our

sanctification. Justification is something, not in ourselves, but a position in which God has placed us before Himself; and those who possess this righteousness, those to whom it is applied by God, being the children of the second Man, possess all that He has and all that He loves. He who has this righteousness of God is born of God, and possesses all that belongs to his Father, who assimilates the rights of His children to those of His Son who is heir of all things. So soon as I am a child of the last Adam, I am in the blessing and righteousness in which Christ Himself is found; and just as I have inherited from the first Adam all the consequences and results of his fall, even so, being born of the last Adam, I inherit all that He has acquired, just as I had inherited from the former.

If it be thus, it is evident that I have part in the glory of Christ; and if life be not there, it is nought. God presents His love to us. He reveals it to us, and His word abides eternally. And here is the way God begins with the soul. He presents this truth to us, ever fresh before Himself; it is not a result produced in us that He makes us see; on the contrary, it is, that man, such as he is, has no part in this righteousness, because the flesh, which is as grass, cannot be in relation with God. He reveals and imparts to us a justification He has accomplished.

God cannot give precepts of sanctification to such as have no justification. The effects of the life of Christ are to convince of sin, and also to cause fruit-bearing. When the gospel was presented at the beginning, it was to Gentiles who, till then, had had no part in the promises of God. There was no need to speak to them of sanctification. And now that all the world calls itself Christian, I must see whether I be really a Christian; but

this idea is not found at all in the Bible. The state of sin was spoken of, and the gospel was preached; now, men say, Am I really a Christian? which thing was not so then. A man takes his practical life to see whereabouts he is, believing that the question is of sanctification, when it is only of justification. This question was not necessary at the commencement. Now, people look at the fruits to see if they have life, and confound with sanctification that which is only a conviction of sin previous to justification by faith and peace with God. Until a soul has consented to say, Jesus is all, and I have nothing—till then, I say, there is nothing in this soul which relates to Christian sanctification. These things must be set right before the soul can have peace. At the preaching of Peter three thousand persons were made happy; they were not in doubt; from the moment a man embraced the gospel, he was a Christian, he was saved.

The progress of practical sanctification must not be confounded with justification, because practical sanctification is wrought in a saved soul that has eternal life. It is an entirely new thing, of which there is no trace before I have found Christ. If we comprehend this passage, “Without holiness [sanctification] no man shall see the Lord” (there is nothing troubles a soul as that often does), it is clear that if I do not possess Christ, I cannot see the Lord; that is very simple. If I have not in myself the life of the second Adam, as I had before the life of the first, never shall I see His face. The tastes natural to the one will develop themselves therein, as they developed themselves in the other. The first inquiry to be made in such a case is, Have you peace with God, the pardon of your sins? If not, the question is of the justification of a sinner. Having then “purified your souls

in obeying the truth through the Spirit”—that is the power “through the Spirit”—the essential thing is the obedience to the truth. People seek purification, and desire to bear fruit, but this is not what God first asks of us; it is obedience, and obedience to the truth.

Whereof does the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, speak? He has much to say to us, but first of all, “All flesh is grass.” He says that no good thing exists in man; the Spirit convinces the world of sin. The whole world lies in wickedness; that world would none of Christ, and the Holy Spirit cannot present Himself without saying, You have rejected the Christ. The Holy Spirit comes into this world and proves to it its pride and its rebellion. Behold, the Son is no longer there, and why? The world has rejected Him. The Spirit comes to say, “The grass is withered,” etc.; then, when this is acknowledged, He communicates the peace that He has preached. He says truly, You are sinners; but He does not speak to sinners of sanctification; He will produce it by the truth, and He tells them the truth. Can man produce it? Nay. It is Christ, He who is the way, the truth, and the life. The Holy Spirit speaks to the sinner of the grace, of the righteousness, of God—of peace, not to make, but made; that is the truth. He convinces the world of what it is, and He speaks to it of that will of God by which the believer is sanctified, that thus we may be obedient to the truth, in submitting to the love of God; and when the soul is subject to the truth, life is there.

He communicates life, “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” The word abides eternally. It is thus that God first produces the principle

of sanctification, which is the life of Christ in us; if the practical means be inquired for, it is the word of truth.

Does the Holy Spirit tell pagans to make progress in sanctification? Does He say this to men unconverted? No. When a sinner has understood the truth, such as God presents it, then the Holy Spirit puts him in relation with God the Father, and this sinner rejoices in all that which Christ has acquired for him. Thus, having "purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit," etc., "being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Dear friends, you will find that it is ever thus.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:10, it is written, as to the unbelieving contrasted with the Christians, that they have not received (or rather accepted) the love of the truth, that they might be saved. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth … but we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

It is, then, the belief of the truth; it is not the belief of the fruits. The Holy Spirit cannot present to me the works He has produced in me, as the object of my faith. He speaks to me of my faults, of my shortcomings, but never of the good works that are in me. He produces them in me, but He hides them from me; for if we think of it, it is but a more subtle self-righteousness. It is like the manna which, being kept, produced worms. All is

spoilt: it is no more faith in action. The Holy Spirit must always present to me Christ, that I may have peace.

The same principle is in John 17:16: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.” The world was not Christ’s aim. During His whole life, though He was not gone out of the world, He was no more of the world than if He had been in heaven. When practice is in question, He says, “They are not of the world, as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth.” Truth is not of the world: this world is a vast lie, which is demonstrated in the history we possess in the Bible. There we find the manifestation of sin in the natural man, and the manifestation of the life of God in the renewed man by His word. “Sanctify them by thy truth.” “For their sakes I sanctify myself.” What does the Lord Jesus here for us? He sets Himself apart. He sanctifies Himself; it is not that He may be more holy, but He makes Himself the model Man. It is not a law requirement; but it is Christ Himself who is life and power, whereof He presents the perfect result. It is Christ who presents the fulfilment and the perfection; He is the vital spring of all; and in considering these things, the reflection of them is in me by faith, which reproduces them in the inner man and in the life.

We find something interesting on this subject in the first chapter of John’s Gospel. “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” The law was not this. It was not a light that condemned; but the life was this light, and we have seen it full of grace and truth—not of truth only, but of grace; and of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. When we have received Christ, there is not a single grace which is not for me, and in

me. There is no Christian who has not every grace that is in Jesus: suppose even a state of failure, it is the strongest case, but this hinders not that we possess all in Him. Failure is a sad thing, but this changes not the position; for the Christian has not received a part only of Christ, but the whole of Christ.

On the one hand, it is encouragement, when I say to myself, I must seek after such a grace; the answer is, Thou possessest it; and, on the other hand, it humbles me, for if I possess it, why is it not manifested? This always supposes that we have received the truth that God has made peace. We must always return to this: "Sanctify them through thy word; thy word is truth." Is it by looking into myself that I shall find this sanctification? No; but by looking to Jesus, in whom it is, Christ having been made unto us of God "righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." I see this humility in Christ, and take pleasure in it; when I look to Him by faith, my soul is in peace. His Spirit is always in me, and I am sanctified by faith in Him, according to that grace which makes me one with Him. Christ gives me all that, and this truth reveals to me that the redemption is made, and I enjoy it, having obeyed the truth.

If any one seeks after sanctification without being assured of his justification, and is troubled about it, doubting whether he be a Christian, then I ask him, What have you to do with sanctification? You have not to think about that for the present. Assure yourself first of all that you are saved: pagans, unbelievers, do not sanctify themselves. If you have faith, you are saved; sanctify yourself in peace. The only question is to consider your sinful state. First, have you obeyed the truth? have you submitted to it? What does God speak to

you about? He speaks of peace made. He says to you, that He has given His Son; He says to you, that He has "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." This is the truth to which you have to submit, and to receive above all, specially before you busy yourself about sanctification, which depends on Him who has given you eternal life.

Begin, then, by obeying the truth. The truth tells you of the righteousness of God, which is satisfied in Jesus, and which is yours; or rather that you are in Christ; then you will enjoy peace, and you will be sanctified in practice. This practical sanctification flows from the contemplation of Jesus. Here is what the apostle Paul says to us on this subject, in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

You see that it is in beholding Jesus that we are transformed from glory to glory. Life, the principle of life, is there, and not in your anxieties; the development of this life of Jesus is progressively realised by looking to Him. It is faith which sanctifies, as also it justifies: it looks unto Jesus.

When Moses came down from the mountain, from before God, he did not know that he also shone with glory, but those who saw him knew it. Moses had looked towards God; others saw the effect. Blessed be God that it is thus in a practical sense! As to practice then, the question is the sanctification of Christians because they are saved, because they are sanctified to God as regards their persons (not those who are not yet so). It is not to exact

(on God’s part), but to communicate life. Now, this communication proceeds from Jesus, who is its source. He communicates life, which is holiness. O that God might always shew us the grace to make us always more and more feel that all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever! “And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you”; it is of this incorruptible seed we are born. What ought not our confidence to be in this word!

The Earnest Of The Inheritance

Ephesians 1

I find, dear friends, that the apostle appears to dwell here on the purposes of God concerning us. He speaks not so much of the means He has used, as of the blessing in which He will set us.

Doubtless, it is a good thing for our souls to understand well the means God has used to bring us to Himself, but this is in order that we may be occupied about the things to which we are called. It is in the enjoyment of these things that the Christian character is formed, and that the soul believes. They pervade our whole being, and when the heart has laid hold of them, we are thereby Christlike, and much more in testimony, so that there is a point of attraction much stronger and more evident, through the power of the Holy Spirit acting in us. This is what we have to seek.

I speak of practical things; not merely of having been saved, but of having tasted of the “grapes of Eshcol,” fruit of the land of promise, of that true Canaan, whereof faith speaks, as my country. You remember, dear friends, that spies were sent by Moses to search the country into which God would make Israel enter; and that they brought back magnificent grapes, fruits characteristic of that desirable country; Num. 13. This is the distinguishing charaaer of faith; it realises, it possesses by the Spirit the “earnest of the inheritance.” Some had understood how it was with this land—a land which was not watered with the foot (as the land of Egypt), but which drank water of the rain of heaven— a land of hills and valleys, rich in every way, which the Lord their God

cared for, on which the Lord their God always had His eyes, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. See Deut. 11:10-12. It was a figure of the heavenly country where all blessing abounds.

The privileged position of Israel was not merely to have been kept from the destroying angel by the blood of the Iamb (Exod. 12:13); neither was it merely to have been secured from Pharaoh by the power of Jehovah (Exod. 14:3-5); nor to have been kept by the cloud behind them, that their incensed enemies should not approach them, even as they were conducted by the same cloud when it went before them (Exod. 14:19, 20); but, moreover, this is what characterised Israel, that they were guaranteed by God that He would care for them in the wilderness, where they had to walk after having been delivered. They were there with God. But alas! their hearts turned back always in thought towards the country that they left. They were, but too often, taken up with the onions and the cucumbers that they had left (Num. 11:5); that is to say, with the carnal desires called the reproach of Egypt; Josh. 5:8, 9. Their hearts were not circumcised.

Dear friends, those who dwell in spirit in the heavenly country take the tone of it, and grow in the things wherein they find themselves. They can be in relation with God. They enjoy all that God has given, which is doubtless very precious; but, above all, they can enjoy God Himself. There is the immensity of the grace of Him who desires that we should always dwell near Him, and that we should know His thoughts and intentions. Yes; it is they who understand best what is “worthy of the Lord”; and this is what we have to desire; Col. 1:10.

It is this of which the apostle desires to speak to us in the chapter which is presented for our meditation. In verses 3 and 4 he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”—in Christ,” the “head of the body.” It is there that God places us. We know it, beloved; but we know it more in theory than in practice. “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” It is not merely of the means (as I have said) that is here spoken, it is of the end that God has proposed to Himself; for it is said, “That we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

This is the thought of God concerning us; He will have us before Him, and have us happy there, and for Himself. There is but one only sense in which God cannot suffice to Himself, that is, in His love; His love needs other beings besides Himself to render them happy. He will render others happy. He will have before Him beings who respond to what He is.

He places us before Him, “holy and without blame.” It is what He is Himself. He it is who is holy. He it is, surely, who is blameless, for it is impossible to impute to Him any fault. He it is who calls Himself “the Holy One.” He it is who is “love.” Important and precious thought for us! He has willed that the church be such, that He may take pleasure in her, and see before Him the reproduction of Himself. He reflects Himself in His children, inasmuch as He places before Himself beings like unto Himself; it is rendering us happy as far as it is possible. He communicates to us His nature, and makes of us His delight.

To this end He makes us “holy and without blame in love.” This is accomplished here below by the Spirit, although the erfects are only found in their perfection above. For example, where is our place already here below? “Before Him.” It is not a simple joy, it is the most precious thing that can be imagined, to be before Him! Adam, a sinner, fled from before God; Gen. 3:8-10. We do not like to be before Him when unholy: but when the conscience is purified by the blood of Christ, we are truly happy “before Him.” See Heb. 10:19-22. We must be holy; we must enter into the tastes of the divine nature; our nature must find its happiness in being holy and without blame in love.

We find in 1 John 4:13 an expression nowhere else to be found in the New Testament. It is this: “He hath given us of his [own] Spirit”; an expression powerful enough to make us comprehend how we are made “partakers of the divine nature,” 2 Peter 1:4. The apostle had already said, “He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us,” 1 John 3:24. The presence of the Spirit was felt by the various effects of His power. It was the proof that God abode in Christians; but this passage of 1 John 4:13 goes much farther. It is evident, not only that God dwells in us, but that we dwell in Him, because He has given us of His Spirit.

As to Jesus, He says, “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me,” John 14:11. If He had not said, “I am in the Father,” one might, perhaps, have formed to oneself an idea that God dwelt in a man to manifest His presence by the effects of His power. Jesus said, “At that day ye shall know” (not only that the Father is in me,

but) “that I am in my Father,” John 14:20. He was one with Him in nature, with Him who dwelt in a nature purely divine, without making Himself man. Also, though in another manner, we know that He dwells in us and we in Him, “because he hath given us of his Spirit.” It was not, in the case of Jesus, a simple manifestation that God was there; this is what the disciples might have supposed, but they had not the idea that Jesus was in God, for this carried with it the participation of the divine nature; and this is what the apostle speaks of (1 John 4:13, which we have already quoted), inasmuch as that applies to us, to wit, that the divine nature reproduces itself in the Christian; he has received of the very Spirit of God. It is a man who loves, and God is in him, and he in God. That which was granted was no less than the communication of the divine life, by which we dwell in Him and He in us, in order that we may be holy and without blame. What we shall be above should be our aim here below, not as an imposed task, but as being made partakers of the divine nature to the glory of God. If we would realise these things, our thoughts must be above, according to the measure of the grace we have received. It is of great advantage to us to think of the things above, of the source, of Jesus, of the accomplishment of this purpose of God in the glory.

Verse 5. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” The apostle has always this adoption in view; that is to say, that God will have us for Himself, before Him, and by Jesus, according to the good pleasure of His will, as His children; and it is the glory of that grace which has placed us there. The apostle speaks afterwards of the basis, of the means

which God has employed, on the certainty of which we may reckon; and he speaks of them as an assured thing. Here is the door by which I may enter; having passed through the door in Jesus, I have the certainty of being in the house. But it would be sad to have Jesus only as a door, however precious it may be to understand that “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace,” v. 7.

If we have not the certainty of our entire acceptance and of the Father’s love, we question the riches of His grace; because we have redemption by His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. If I am in uncertainty, I do not enjoy this grace. I must cast myself entirely on God, on the power of Him who bids me enter. If I calculate, how can I calculate the riches of that grace? We cannot number our sins, and how much less the riches of the grace of the Lord. But it is this which has to be calculated; I say it for those who are in anguish, the only thing to be done is to consider the riches of the grace of God; it will be one means of drawing nearer to Him.

The Lord does more still than assuring us of His grace. He says, “wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence,” v. 8. He hath done all things from Himself. “Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself; that [it is always the dominant thought in Paul] in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are upon earth, even in him,” v. 9, 10. There is the thought of God; He will gather together all things in Christ, and here is the knowledge which is given us of His thought. He will

“gather together in one all things in Christ which are in heaven and which are on earth, in him, in whom we also have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ.” And here, dear friends, I beg your attention to the thought of the apostle, who says to us that God will “gather together in one all things in Christ.”

The church is to be His joint-heir: that is the mystery or secret of His will; but He unites these things to promises which had been made on the earth, to the ancient promises made to Abraham, namely, the coming of the Messiah and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The question was, how to make this promise reach to the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit is “the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory,” v. 14. When the apostle says “we” (v. 12), he speaks of the remnant of the Jews, since afterwards he says “you,” in speaking of the Gentiles; v. 13. The “first” (v. 12) are not the Gentiles, nor the Jews as having believed before them, but those among the Jews who first believed, having got the start of the nation, and who are placed as the first-fruits of this same nation which hereafter shall believe, and which shall then say, “Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord.” See Matt. 23:39; Psalm 118:26. They believed before they saw Messiah manifested in His power; they anticipated the manifestation of His glory.

Take now the promise made in Joel 2: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all

flesh," etc. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the great thing for us, whether for enjoyment or for anything else. It shall happen after these things. God speaks here of the time when He shall have re-established the Jews in their land, for He says, "My people shall never be ashamed. And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." This is after the blessing of the people, in order that they may enjoy it. But when the day of Pentecost is there, Peter says, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," Acts 2:16. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit only descended on a small number, because the nation had not received Christ.

It is evident that was not the full accomplishment of this prophecy, for there were but few persons who believed in Christ without seeing; and those were Jews. But here, the Gentiles enter also by faith, and are "sealed." They do not receive the Holy Ghost after the accomplishment of the things foretold by Joel, for they are not yet accomplished; but some have anticipated all that by faith, and the Gentiles are also "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

The Holy Spirit comes down too upon the Gentiles to put the "seal" upon men, and to give the "earnest" of the things that we have not yet, that we possess not but by faith. When God shall have accomplished all things, there will be no more need of faith, nor of the "seal": the Holy Spirit will be no more given as the "earnest." No doubt we shall, in heaven, be filled with the Holy Spirit to enable us to enjoy heavenly things, when they shall be present before our eyes; but there will be no need of a "seal "upon us, when we shall be in the glory, no need of "earnest" when we shall be enjoying the very things of

God. What is presented to us in this passage is, then, the character that the Holy Spirit takes meanwhile, in those who first hoped in Christ, in order that they might be “to the praise of his glory,” and made “partakers of the inheritance.”

But, in the midst of a world knowing nothing of the thoughts of God, of this mystery of His will, which has caused His grace to abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence, I, a poor Gentile, I believe in all these things, in this purpose of God to gather together in one all things in Christ, in the special position of the church, “holy and without blame before him,” and the object of His delights. He has “sealed” us together for that. The church, which has believed without seeing, shall be “holy and without blame before him in love,” because God has given her “of his Spirit.”

The church shall not only be blessed in His presence, but shall be also the expression of what God is, because God has given her of His Spirit. What is important in the position of the church for us Gentiles is, that having faith we are there also, having “heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory,” v. 13, 14.

Afterwards, the apostle, recognising all the saints as “one body” in Christ, desired, first, that their hope might be clear and intelligent; and, secondly, that they might experience the power of the life of Christ. He desires first, that the saints may intelligently enjoy the calling of God, all the glory of “his inheritance in the saints,” and

then, verses 19-23, that they may know “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.” God has willed a special glory for the church; and to return to her position before God, she is “holy and without blame in love.”

Two things constitute our hope: first, what we are before God; and, secondly, the position in which He places us above all things, for the possession of the inheritance that Jesus has acquired to the praise of His glory. That is what we are to seek into, and what is to be our every-day occupation. I do not say to what extent the thing can be realised, but we must understand what God has meant to do in placing us so high. There are no clouds there; I say not, no difficulties, but when we are before God, close to Him, we feel that He wills all that, and that He wills that we be there, and that the cords of His love are drawn between Him and us—that He holds us. Dear friends, are our hearts occupied about these things? Do they realise this communion with God? Do they enjoy their privileges in Christ? In order to that, they must be on a good foundation; to enjoy, we must understand that we have the forgiveness of our sins, redemption, by the blood of Jesus; we must have entered in by the door, quiet in the presence of God; His love must be shed

abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which has been given to us; Rom. 5:5. “Hope maketh not ashamed” (whatever be the difficulties), “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.” The Holy Spirit having been given us as a seal, and dwelling in us, it may indeed happen that we fail in many respects by our foolish negligence, but we are in the position to enjoy all.

What is special is the Holy Spirit given as seal after we have believed, before the things themselves be accomplished. Thus, we are able to enjoy all that belongs to the church, that God has “predestinated… to the praise of his glory.” Having the love shed abroad in the heart, I do not say, being assured of this love (that is doubtless very much), but the love being shed abroad in the heart, and enjoying this love, we have the assurance of being before Him “holy and without blame,” and of possessing all the glory of the inheritance. I apply this to the practical state of my soul.

Oh! that Christians may be as in the house of their Father, tended, sustained—weak, perhaps; but, at least, let their Father’s house be the place where in their weakness they grow, and that there they may savour what He has done for them! Let us comprehend that the Holy Spirit has been given as the “seal,” as the “earnest,” of infinitely higher things. God places us before Him “holy and without blame,” and He does it for the church here below, because He wills to reproduce Himself in us. The church is before Him in Christ, and we are called to be “the followers of God as dear children” (chap. 5:1), by the power of the Holy Spirit, whilst passing through this world as others. We may fail as to the testimony we are called to bear; but may God

give us the intelligence to live in these things, and to walk therein! It is what He desires to do by His Spirit; and it is what He promises by the manifestation of His presence in the midst of us.

May God so fill us by His Spirit, that we may glorify Him, and walk as those who first hoped in Christ!

Christ, The Faithful Witness

Revelation 1:1-5

Before beginning the prophetic part of this book, the Lord addresses Himself to the seven churches of Asia by the mouth of John, in wishing “Grace be unto you, and peace from him which is, and which was, and which is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before his throne.” Thus, before beginning the prophecy, the Christians are put in their place; and it is on this I have to dwell now.

The eternal Spirit speaks here, not under the characters of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, because He speaks of that which God will do on the earth; it is rather according to the Jewish form—Jehovah upon His throne, and not a Father in the midst of His family; Eph. 1 and 4. The Holy Spirit is presented to us, not in His unity, but in the diversity of His perfection; that is, displayed in the manifestation of Himself, in what He is, and in what He does; Rev. 4:5; chap. 5:6. Finally, the Lord Jesus is spoken of as what He was on earth, and what He will be as Mediator, who has come, and who will come.

This address, then, differs a little from those which we find at the head of the epistles; nevertheless, he wishes “grace and peace.” When the apostle addresses individuals, as Titus, Timothy, etc., he adds “mercy.” The moment we contemplate a Christian individually, it is needful for him to wish mercy; but as to the church, it is viewed in Spirit, perfect and accepted before God, having received mercy. It is ever as God sees it, in its privileges—praying that it may enjoy them: “John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you,

and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

There are three things in these last verses: (1) the wish of grace and peace, and the description of the Person in whose name this wish is made—Jesus Christ, "the Faithful Witness," etc., (2) in the fifth and sixth verses, we have the answer of the church, the instant that Christ is named before Jehovah— the answer unto Him that loved us; (3) in verse 7, we have not the response of the church, of the heart of the church, but the revelation of the knowledge which the church possesses with reference to the world. The subject here is not the faith which fills the heart with joy through the knowledge it possesses of Jesus. For there are two kinds of knowledge; that which produces the answer of the heart of the church as to itself, and that which it possesses of what is in the world.

Jesus is presented here under three characters: the Faithful Witness, the First-Begotten of the dead, the Prince of the kings of the earth. He has not yet taken this last power. He has perfectly represented God; He is conqueror of death; He has all power, it is true, on earth, but it is verse 7 which answers as regards the full accomplishment of this character. "Behold, he cometh

with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him," etc.

I will enlarge a little on the answer of the church, verses 5, 6: "Unto him that loved us," etc. Observe the effect of the thought, and what Jesus is in the heart of the faithful and of all the church! There is nothing which stops; there is instantaneously the answer of praise and thanksgiving. The moment that the church is found in the presence of this grace of Jesus, there is nothing but praise. There is no considering, no hesitating, no doubt nor difficulty. The only thing that faith has to do is immediately to say, as soon as the grace of the Lord Jesus is come to the ears of the church, "Unto him that loved us… be glory and dominion for ever and ever." It is the natural and necessary answer of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and the revelation of what Christ is.

Too often, alas! there is a quantity of prefaces in our hearts, in order to put us upon the ground of praise. Here there is nothing of the sort. It is the effect that the Holy Spirit must produce in the heart which is in its normal state, whether in the heart of the believer, or in that of the church; because, as soon as we have believed that God regards the church in Christ, He puts aside individual circumstances. Christ is there. The presence of Christ blots out every other thing: we are entitled to forget all, even ourselves and our state.

I will not say that individual circumstances are nothing in their place—very far from it; but the essential thing is to be a Christian, and it is necessary, in this vocation itself, to make new progress every day. The Christian is perfectly washed, purified, and capable of enjoying Jesus; he is all that Jesus wished that he should be, and

in Him a partaker of joy and peace—of that which He has purchased for us, and of all that we are in Him. And when it is a question of the church of God, of the adoration or the worship that we render Him, we are then, in our capacity as Christians, putting out of sight our circumstances and the flesh which is in us, for the purpose of enjoying, as Christians, by the Spirit, all that Christ is for us.

It is most important for the children of God to apprehend their position aright. When it is said that He is “the Faithful Witness,” the question is, not to say, I have not been the faithful witness, I ought to have been that; but rather to say, it is He that has washed us. I am entitled to think only of Jesus, only of what He has done for me; I am entitled to be set there.

If I am before God alone in my closet, it is needful that I judge myself. I may say to myself, You have not understood that you are a king and a priest; and the Holy Spirit makes me examine my state. But with other Christians, in my capacity as a Christian, I am there for the purpose of enjoying all that which Jesus has entitled me to enjoy—all things that He has done for those who believe in Him. It is true that my individual state may hinder me from enjoying as I ought all the fulness of the grace of Jesus. It is possible that I may be more or less incapable of enjoying my position, but that does not change the position itself; it is so much the worse for me if I enjoy not my title.

Important as it is to judge ourselves, it is very important also to think of all our privileges in Christ; it is this which imparts strength to sacrifice all; it is this which purifies, which sanctifies. The extent of the privileges of

the Christian strengthens bim to get aloof from a multitude of things of this world. When we have understood heavenly things, we can immediately say, “Unto him that loved us,” etc. The Christian is no more to think of the particulars of his state, but “unto him that loved us.” When in the presence of the Lord, there is nothing prepared for God but praise and adoration: “to him be glory and dominion.” The Christian remembers what Christ is for him. The Christian may sometimes say, I am not in a state to praise; he may, it is true, be more or less capable of doing it well, but he is always in a state to do it. If a man who has sinned is there in the midst of his brethren, he may be cast down in humiliation, but he is, and ought always to be, in the position to praise doubly the grace shewn him, because Christ is always suitable to a sinful soul. His praises will be modified, but he will always praise.

So also, whenever a Christian is in circumstances of chastening from the love of the Father, there is some hindrance to his enjoying this gladsome liberty of the Spirit; nevertheless, because Christ has done all for him, he can always praise Him.

That which makes the thing more remarkable is, that this song is sung in heaven. Observe what is said (chap. 5:9) to “him that sat upon the throne.” Those who begin the strain sing “a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.” Clearly there is but a trifling difference. They sing better, without doubt, in heaven than on earth; but it is very nearly the same song. There is no other subject

of praise for heaven than for earth; the blood of Christ has the same efficacy on earth as in heaven: that for which they praise God there is equally true for us. Their harps are better tuned than ours, but their song is the same.

Well, the power and the glory of Jesus (who has accomplished all) being there, the Spirit who reveals Him to our souls produces in us praise and adoration:—those sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ are the answer to that which the Spirit reveals to our hearts. When the Holy Spirit reveals to our hearts what Christ has done, we know that we ought to praise. What else could we do? What the Holy Spirit can produce in us is thankfulness, adoration, and praise.

I speak of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. Observe the three things, and the immediate effect of the revelation of Jesus. He speaks of a simple certainty of His love. One may reason about it oneself, and not be sure of His love; but if it were given us to see Him, could we have a doubt? Did ever one that met Him on earth find any other thing than love? He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Our view may be obscured, but we know that He is love. If I commit myself unreservedly to what He is, He is love.

He came not for the purpose of judging. If I think on what Christ is, He is love. If I take the history of Jesus, I can see what He has done, but it is impossible to find a single trait to indicate that He did not love; and the truth of the word, that He in no wise casts out him that comes to Him, has had its entire accomplishment. None could say, I have been to Him, but He wished me not. The Son has rejected none of those whom the Father

sent Him; and here is the greatest proof of the humiliation of Jesus, that He gathered and received all those who His Father sent Him. Had there not been love in Him, never would He have been in this position; His perfect obedience, and His infinite incomprehensible love, placed Him there; but not one did He refuse, because He was doing, not His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. He cannot refuse us. Knowing our unbelief, He came to do the will of His Father, and to glorify the Father during the whole course of His ministry; and He must receive those who come.

May God give us grace to think of Jesus! Certainly, the soul must see itself in its true light; but that is preparatory to the enjoyment of Him; for it is so hard for man to see himself vile and sinful, and God leaves a soul sometimes for a while in doubt; but nevertheless He has loved us, and the first thing the heart must possess is the persuasion that, notwithstanding our great misery, God makes known His love to us, and, when we are come thus far, we are to enjoy it, and we have no more than to say, To Him who loved us, and who hath washed us from our sins in His own blood: to Him be praise, worship, and glory!

He has washed us; a soul may have an imperfect knowledge of its salvation; it is not made free, but love may be there, though even it be ignorant that it is saved. That poor woman who was a sinner, coming before Jesus, weeping and not daring to speak, had been drawn to Jesus (Luke 7); she manifested to Him an affection that ruled her; her heart was thoroughly melted, and she dared not to express herself. Jesus had understood all that, and she had understood the heart of God better than Simon, who had not expended a drop of water to

wash the feet of Jesus, nor a little oil to anoint His head. But the woman understood the heart of God, not the effects of His love, but the love of God in Jesus; also Jesus said, “Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much.” But she knew it not yet. This woman had understood that there was love in Jesus; she was even appalled at her sins; but when Jesus spoke to her, she could have said, “He loved me.” And we also can say, “He loved us, and has washed us in his own blood.”

There is more still; for there is what He has made of us and for us, “kings and priests to God his Father.” Behold Him, the subject of our songs! It is Christ; but in looking upon Him, we see what He has made us before God His Father. There is something very touching in the thoughts and the counsels of love. Love wills that the beloved shall enjoy the same blessing of glory as he who loves. Christ is from God, King and Priest, the nearest to God as King and Priest in power and in approach to Him. Well, because He loves us, He will have us placed in the same position of blessing as Himself, and we are by faith already there. Something would have been wanting to His love if He had not done it; and it is because He has made us kings and priests that the subject of our praise is not equivocal, and what ought to proceed from the heart by the Spirit is praise and adoration. One may sing well or ill, high or low, according to the state of one’s soul, but it is a song that ought to be sung without one discordant note.

Let us see whereon this is founded. It is on Jesus Christ, who is the Faithful Witness. It is always Christ, on the part of God, who is something. It is the Faithful Witness; and we need Him, for in what way can a sincere soul have knowledge of itself? It is generally occupied with

itself. It says, I am this, I am that; it finds some uncertainty as to what it really is, as if God did not know. If it had sufficient wisdom, it would have done with itself; it would know it could find no good in itself; it would refer to the judgment of Christ.

Christ knew well what Peter was, when he said to Him, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,” Luke 5. Did not Jesus know it? Yes: He knew it perfectly. Well, it was Peter who knew it not; it was just simply a remnant of pride; and that soul is precisely in the same case which seeks for these things by searching within itself, and expects not to find itself in the mud. But if a soul recognises itself in this state of utter ruin, God has searched it out: His love is there.

But we need a “Faithful Witness.” We see God in nature; that is true, but all this knowledge does not lead man to God. Man has spoilt all. The traces of God, of the Architect, are there; but it is a ruin. All is defiled from His mind; all is in degradation. The ways of providence are incomprehensible. A soul under chastening understands nothing. There is “one event to the righteous and to the wicked “; it is always an enigma for them until God judges. The certainty of what God is cannot be found in this inexplicable providence. The sinner, man, needs something; then Jesus appears. Is Jesus sufficient for a witness? Does holiness lack in Him? Was He not jealous enough for the glory of God? Could a poor soul be more so than Jesus was, all holy as He was, all zealous for the glory of His Father. He who came, from God Himself, in the midst of sinners, was full of love. Impossible to find more love and grace than in Him; impossible to find anything but the Faithful Witness. One may trust in Him, for there is no

uncertainty in His testimony. He is the Faithful Witness. God could say, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

I have found the Faithful Witness, and in receiving Him I glorify God and give thanks for Him. In coming to Jesus, we leave all: that is the practical effect. We abide in the truth, we have found God such as we are: that is to say, in whatsoever state of sin a soul may find itself, there is no more guile; Psalm 32. Such as this soul is, it is itself before God also, such as He is; not a God who has been deceived, but, in His Faithful Witness, the One who, when sin abounded, caused grace much more to abound.

Impossible that Jesus should not be the light of every sinful soul, whatever be its state. He is the true and faithful Witness; and this is precious, that He is the light which lightens every man that comes into the world, whatever be the state of the man. Christ is love; the greater sinner I am, the more need I have of Him.

Moreover, the heart which has understanding in the ways of God, says, Christ is the firstborn from the dead. He who had the power of death could not detain Him, neither could the anger of God, for this was glorified in the bursting forth of His justice, in His death; and that same justice was to raise Him up and bear testimony to Him. And herein is the subject of our joy, that Jesus has manifested, as man, the effects of sin, and His power over all the effects of sin. Not only did He die, but He is the Firstborn from among the dead, and the Head of the church which is His body; Col. I:18. He has manifested by His death and resurrection, that He has the power to raise us. He is the Head of the body. Such is He for us, the Firstborn, the Faithful Witness; and for the world,

the Prince of the kings of the earth. He will then manifest and display all His power and His rights even toward those who will have denied Him.

He is the Faithful Witness as regards our sins, and it is our happiness that He has not hidden them from us. The imagination of men inclines to the belief that it is necessary to add, on our part, certain sentiments to this testimony; and many fine discourses cherish this thought, and torment the soul; but by no means. Men imagine that there is I know not what process to be used to apply it to themselves. By no means is it so. We must think through grace that Jesus is the truth, and all suitable sentiments come afterwards; impossible that there should be good ones before faith. If conviction of sin is not there, the man imagines there is some good in him. The conviction of sin comes by faith, not by intelligence; it is by the efficacy of the work of Christ. I will give an example of it. When Peter preached to the Jews (Acts 3), he said to them, “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just … and killed the Prince of life.” If they had not believed him, they would not have said, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? “If faith had not been in their heart, they would not have believed themselves lost; when they believed in Jesus, a thousand things followed. Their peace flowed from their believing in the efficacy of the work of Jesus, which the apostle explained to them in answer to this cry.

There may be pious sentiments, but without faith there will be no results. But the certainty of salvation is a consequence which God reveals to me of the work of Christ. If God says to me, Thou hast killed the Prince of life, by this very means I know that all my sins are washed out. When God says, This is what I have done, I

have washed out all thy sins by the sin thou hast committed in killing the Prince of life, faith alone can make me comprehend this. The heart torments itself while the thing is simple. It is to believe the witness that God has given of His Son. And this love which is boundless, this Jesus who is the Faithful Witness, let us receive Him as such, and as the image of the living God, who is always love.

The Hope Of The Christian

I have been occupied, for my own soul, with the inquiry what is the hope of the Christian, and I send you some points of the result, thinking they may be a means of cheering and encouraging some of God's dear children. The first important point which this result brings powerfully home to the heart and conscience is, that the source of this hope, and the only means of rightly estimating it, the only sure ground on which the heart can rest in appropriating it, is that all that I hope for is the fruit of the grace of Jesus, that in which His own heart finds its delight, in giving to us, because it is that of which He knows in Himself the blessedness, and because His love is perfect towards.us. His interest in us is as perfect as Himself. This is essentially characteristic of perfect love. All this, I need not say, is according to the counsels of the Father. "It is not mine to give," says Christ, "but to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." For it is what He takes as man, that He gives to us, and hence, as receiving it Himself as man from His Father, and delighting in it as the expression of the Father's love.

This thought brings out another simple, but remembering who Jesus is, a most blessed and wonderful truth-, that where there is perfect love on the one hand, and capacity of enjoyment through possession of the same nature on the other, love will seek to introduce its object into the common enjoyment of that which it possesses, and finds its blessing and happiness in. This is true of a friend, a parent, and every genuine human attachment; though, of course, in these cases,

imperfection is attached to the affection itself, and to its power of accomplishing its wish to make happy. But the perfection of Christ's love does not, since it is love to us, make our introduction into the enjoyment of His blessedness a thing not to be hoped for because it is too excellent, but just lays the sure ground for this hope. It is His own delight to make us happy, a part of the perfection of His nature, His own satisfaction. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

It is to this I would first of all direct the attention of yourself and your readers. Christ is finding His own delight and joy in blessing us, and in blessing us with Himself, because He loves us; and this blessing must be according to the perfectness of His own nature, for it flows from Him, and is to be enjoyed with Himself, and as He enjoys it before and with the Father. What a scene this opens before us, if we have indeed tasted His love! And yet it is all dependent on His own free goodness, and the fruit and display of it, the happiness itself being dependent on His own excellency. That His grace is the source of it every Christian will recognise; but I think you will find that, in taking Scripture to guide us in the details it gives of our future blessedness, this character of blessing shines out most evidently. And it is the elements of our future joy which Scripture affords, which I would present to you, though surely grace is needed to give them their value, which will be just proportionate to our personal estimate of Christ Himself; that is, to our spiritual knowledge of Him.

Our possession of the life of Christ, His being our life, so that it can be said of it, in its nature and fruits, "which thing is true in him and in you," is the basis of our hope, and that which makes us, in connection with His work

on the cross, capable of enjoying it. He became a man, and having first wrought redemption, and glorified God in our behalf, and put away sin for us, and made peace, He becomes, as victorious over death, and entering risen and glorified into God's presence, the source of life to us, nay, more, our life. We are thus brought into the place of sons, all the old thing, with its fruits and nature, judged, condemned, and done away, whatever conflicts and exercises of heart we may have with it, and through it, while down here. As alive in Christ we stand before God, consequent on the accomplishment of redemption, and in virtue of complete forgiveness. "He hath quickened us together with him, having forgiven us all trespasses." We are introduced in the place of sons with Christ, as the result and fruit of redemption, and as really partaking of the life in which He lives. See how the Spirit in 1 John (which specially treats of the existence, possession, and development of this life in Christ, and so in us. See chapter 1:1, 2; chap. 5:11, 12, for the general principle) connects us with Christ in life, position, and, consequently, hope. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God." We have, by adoption, Christ's relationship with God, yet as really born of God, possessing a nature displayed in the same qualities. "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (the true and perfect Son of God). "Beloved, now are we the sons [children] of God, and 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. And every man that hath this hope in him [Christ] purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

Blessed testimony in all its parts! born of God, we have the nature (morally) and position of that true, blessed, and eternal Son made man, that in His glory we may be with Him and like Him. We are children of God, unknown by the world consequently as He was. We shall be perfectly like Him in glory, seeing Him as He now is above in heavenly glory, and hence can bear no lower standard now. Having this hope in Christ, reaching to, and founded on Himself, we seek to be as like Him now as possible, in the inner man, and in our ways we purify ourselves as He is pure. What a picture of the moral position of the Christian is here, through his living connection with Christ! It is sweet to say it is ours, sweeter to say we have it in Him, and that He Himself is the perfection of it. If His life is animating us, through the strengthening grace and communications of the Holy Spirit, what a power and value will such a statement have for us, living by and dwelling in Him!

Here, then, is one great and blessed part of our hope, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." It is perfect-ness in likeness to Christ, in ourselves morally in its full result, for it is in glory; that is, all the full fruit of the power of this life as in Christ, produced even as to the body, while its internal excellence, likeness to Christ, is perfect, and no hindrance to its exercise, but, quite the contrary, a suited condition: and with the blessed consciousness that we are like Him, though we have it all from Him. We shall be like Him.

But secondly, in this state we shall have the full blessed object, in which this perfect nature delights, and in this state is capable of delighting in, in all its absolute and heavenly excellency, before us—its satisfying object; an object which can keep all its powers in blessed and full

exercise, can occupy it with perfect delight. And yet while I delight in Him as supremely excellent, the full display of heavenly excellence, I know that I am like Him; I could not (my desires being fixed on this, having tasted its excellence) be perfectly happy, were I not. Yet in us this excellence is a capacity to be occupied with its perfection in Him. However great our glory and excellency may be, it is only as being like Him. He is the thing we are like. He is it in its own proper and positive substantive being and existence. If I am adopted to be a son, am really born of God, a child, He is the Son. Hence all our excellence is the means of apprehending and adoring His.

We may remark that this is true, both in moral perfections and in relationship. God is perfect in Himself and for Himself. Love and holiness, as indeed every other attribute of God, have their joy in themselves, and of course perfectly and infinitely in God. But the creature needs an object to enjoy perfectly what this blessed nature is and gives, even when he possesses it. The new man delights in holiness, but the perfect holiness of God is needed for the perfect delight of our new and holy nature. The new man has a nature imbued with charity, and so can delight in its exercise; but the perfect love of God, manifested in Jesus, and known in communion, is his delight. So in our relationship we are sons with God; but I must learn in Jesus what it is to be a son, and what the power of that word is, “the Father loveth the Son.” We share in the glory; but the glory in which we share is His.

In the hope, then, presented to us in this passage, we have the Father’s love presented as the source, so that we are already children of God, so as to know our

position; but this flowing from our being born of God, from Christ being our life, and we as He, so that even the world does not know us, as it did not know Him; we are so identified with Him that, though what we shall be does not yet appear, we know we shall be like Him when He shall do so; seeing Him in the very glory in which He now is as Son, with the Father, viewed in manhood on high. It is not as the world will see Him, being blessed under Him, and seeing Him so far as He can be revealed to mortal eyes; but being like Himself, and seeing Him as He is.

This leads to another part of the blessing, which is equally the joy of Jesus Himself. We shall be with Him. Evidently, if we love and delight in Him, this is needed for our full joy; and while He ministers this in us now, by being present with us in grace, it is the object of our hope in its full character and permanent fulness. “So shall we ever be with the Lord.” Remark here, that the apostle, when speaking here of the Lord’s coming, does not enter at all, as regards our portion, into the consequences in glory and dominion. This has its place; but what satisfies and fills the apostle’s heart, when he has the revelation of the way in which God would call up the saints to their enjoyment, is, for his own feeling of joy and delight, all embraced in this, “So shall we ever be with the Lord.”

This is, more than once, brought before us by Christ Himself. “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” The connection of these last words with what precedes, throws light on the value and extent of this hope. The Lord continues, “O righteous Father, the

world hath not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.”

The Father had to decide, so to speak, between Christ and His disciples on one side and the world on the other, for the moral separation was complete. What the Father was, had been fully shewn in Christ. The world could recognise nothing of it: there was no common principle or bond. The disciples had recognised, at least, through grace, that He came from the Father. He could not stay in the world. That was closed. His departure forms the groundwork of the whole chapter. Whether He or the world could be owned of the Father could leave no doubt. The Father, and necessarily so, had loved Him before ever the world existed; and if the world rejected Him, the hour was come for the Father to glorify Him with Himself. For the time, no doubt, the disciples were to remain in the world; but He had declared unto them the Father’s name, and would declare it, that the love wherewith the Father loved Him might be in them, and He in them. Hence He would have them where He was. They would be able to enjoy it, since they know the same love, and He was in them to be the power of the enjoyment. It was not only their desire and blessing, but His. He would have them where He was, if He could not (and it was far better, surely) remain where they must be for the moment.

Mark here, that this connects it with the knowledge of the Father’s love, as it rests on Jesus. He desired to have them with Himself. It was a part of His delight. He would shew them His glory, who had walked with Him in His humiliation. But besides this, there was the capacity of enjoying what He enjoyed along with Him; for the

Father's name He had revealed as He knew it, and that the love wherewith He was loved might be in them.

What a hope is this, and, blessed be God, founded on a present blessing, only as yet in an earthen vessel, and known in present imperfection! And if we are with Christ, it is in the Father's house, where He is in the Father's love. He is not alone, He is gone to prepare a place for us; nor will He be content to send and fetch us, He will come and receive us to Himself, that where He is we may be also. This same chapter (John 14) shews that it is our present knowledge of the Father, as revealed in the Son, that is the means of knowing what this joy is, and coming to the enjoyment of it. We shall be there with the Lord, ever with Him: no interruption, no decay of joy, but rather ever increasing delight, as there always is when the object is worthy of the heart, and here it is infinite: and this in the relation of the Father's affection for the Son. We are with Him in that place, with Himself, and with Him in the joy, infinite joy, which He has in the Father's love, a love resting on Him as Son, but in His excellency as such, loved before the world was, and now the accomplisher of redemption.

Some other passages will help to fill up the great leading traits here given, both as to the glory and our living with the Lord, shewing our identification or association with Him, and the character of this blessedness. "The glory thou hast given me, I have given them," the Lord says, "that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and thou in me." If Christ is in us now the hope of glory, He will be in us then the display of glory. He will be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe. It is not here mutuality, but manifestation, manifestation through the fulness and

excellency of that which is displayed, being in Him that displays it: the Father in Christ, and Christ in us. “Thou in me,” says the Lord. The Father is in Him, in divine unity and fulness; and yet here, mark, Christ is spoken of as one to whom glory is given: that is, though a divine Person, He is considered also as man; and then, “I in them,” so that as the Father is displayed in the Son, as in Him, so the Son, Christ, in us, as in us.

I will now refer to Psalms 16 and 17, which collaterally throw light on this part of our subject. In Psalm 16, which is (with others) quoted in Scripture as shewing the humanity of Jesus, His taking our sorrows and position of dependence on and obedience to God (that is, our position as saints), it is said, “I have said to Jehovah, Thou art my Lord, my goodness extendeth not to thee—to the saints on the earth, in them is all my delight.” That is, having the divine glory, He associates Himself with the saints on the earth, those excellent in God’s sight. At the close He shews that, as One who is the head of these, the path of life is shewn to Him. In God’s presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand pleasures for evermore. This, then, in principle, is a part of our hope, as His “companions,” though He be anointed with the oil of joy above us. We are in God’s presence, where fulness of joy is. Where God’s presence shews itself, it fills all things, and excludes all contrary to itself. It necessarily makes infinitely and perfectly happy. It sufficed to Christ’s hope—His who knew it best and perfectly—surely, then, to ours: and, as we have seen, we have a nature capable, without alloy or mixture, of perfectly enjoying that presence.

Let me add, too, that we shall not lose the Holy Ghost by being in glory: loss indeed it would be. Our nature of joy

will be the new nature, the divine nature of which we are made partakers; our power of joy the Holy Ghost who dwells in us. It is striking that even Jesus, after His resurrection, gave commandments to His apostles by the Holy Ghost. (Compare Romans 8:11.)

Psalm 16 gives the fruit of dependence; Psalm 17, as God will be found as a righteous answer to Christ's claim, in virtue of His walk and obedience, to the beholding the Lord's face, and awaking after His likeness; of this we have spoken in 1 John 3. The beholding of the face of God, we find again in Revelation 22: only it is there, in a more general way, the glory. God and the Lamb are thrown, so to speak, together. It is not the Father, and being with the Son. God and the Lamb that was slain are brought objectively into one point of view. The portion there shewn to us is seeing His face, His servants serving Him, His name on our foreheads; that is, privilege in approaching, service as it should be, and the perfect and evident witness in us of whose we are. This is a more external part of the joy, but it is most precious, and not to be omitted.

Luke 9 will afford us light also, both on the glory, and living with Christ. It is, we know, a picture, a momentary manifestation of the glory of the kingdom. Moses and Elias are in the same glory with Christ. They are with Him in all the intimacy of familiar conversation talking with Him. They are talking of what necessarily most interests Christ Himself, and man too—of His death, and that in connection with the great change about to take place in God's ways—His death at Jerusalem. They do so with a divine knowledge, for it was not yet come. The excellent glory, too, is there. They enter into it. Remark

here, that Christ speaks of the same things with the same familiarity to His disciples on the earth.

Another testimony gives what is more personal. For all we have spoken of is common to all saints. We shall have a white stone; that is, the perfectly approving testimony of the Lord; and on it a name written, which no man knew but he who received it. That is a joy and communion and personal knowledge of the Lord, which was for him alone who had it, between his soul and Christ.

I have thus spoken of what is personally or individually enjoyed: there is, besides all this, the presenting of the church to Christ; the glory of the kingdom, looking downwards, that is, towards that over which we shall reign. But these are not at the moment my object. But how bright and blessed is the hope that is before us, founded on the acceptance of Christ Himself! to see Him —be like Him—with Him in His own relationship with the Father—to converse with Him with divine intelligence—be before God with Him—enjoy the unmingled, unclouded blessedness of His presence—with and like Him—yet to receive it all from Him—to owe it all to Him. Another point in the transfiguration is worthy of all attention. They, that is, Moses and Elias, enter into the cloud. Now this cloud was the dwelling-place of the divine glory—"the excellent glory," as Peter calls it. Hence, the three apostles feared, when Moses and Elias entered into it. But not so do we read of Moses and Elias.

This, then, is another part of our hope. If a voice comes out of the cloud for those on earth, it is the home of those who have their place in the heavenly glory. I may

add, in connection with this part of my subject, that I do not doubt that Psalm 145 gives us something analogous on earth to the intercourse between the Lord and Moses and Elias. If you look at verses 5-7, there is, I doubt not, the intercourse between Messiah and the godly in the excellent glory of Jehovah. But this by the bye.

I would have the reader remark, how all this joy has its counterpart and commencement of realisation down here, save the glory of the body alone. How the heart knows that, how sweet soever the common joy of saints (a necessary proof and accompaniment of the holy liberty of the Spirit in a pure heart), yet that in joys and sorrows, there is a looking to Jesus, a communion with Jesus, a dependence of heart on His approbation, in which none can participate. On high it will be perfectly enjoyed and possessed, in the white stone and the new name. The heart that knows Him could not do without this.

Let us remark, too, how various the joy is—and so it is now. I delight in the nature of God; I delight in a Father's love; I delight in the glory of Jesus; I delight in my intimacy with Him; I delight in the blessedness of being with the Son before the Father; I delight in His being a man, with whom I am, yet one divinely perfect; I delight in God and the Lamb—the blessed and glorious display of redeeming counsels and divine glory; I delight in being like Christ; I delight in all the saints being like Him; I delight in His being glorified in them; I delight in adequate service, in a full and perfect witness, in a fit and heavenly worship; I delight in what is proper to God; I delight in what is the glory of Christ Himself, as such; it is what is common to all, and what is peculiar to oneself. The Christian will remark, too, that in enjoying

Christ in glory, he will not lose the blessed feeding on a once humbled Saviour: we know this also now, we delight in communion, and in hope in the glorified Lord; but we turn back and feed on Jesus, lowly and rejected, on the earth. If He is what we hope for in glory, He is what we need on earth; but our heavenly state will surely not diminish our power of delighting in the perfection of that blessed One. And as a pot of the manna, which had nourished Israel in the desert, was to be kept in the ark in Canaan, that Israel, in its rest, might know what had sustained them in the desert, so we shall eat of that hidden manna, which has nourished and fed our souls in our pilgrimage.

But I close. May hope be as living in the saints as the object of it is worthy of all their hearts. May they abound in hope, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Let me recommend, as throwing light on this, Ephesians 1, where our position before God, our relationship with the Father, and the difference of our calling and our heritage, are very clearly brought out.

Christian Devotedness

If there be one thing of importance now, it is Christian devotedness. I do not separate this from Christian doctrine, but found it on it. I do not surely separate it from the presence and power of the Spirit (one of the most important of these doctrines), for it is produced by it. But Christian devotedness founded on the truth, and produced by the power of the Spirit, I believe to be of the utmost importance for the saints themselves and for the testimony of God. I believe surely that doctrine is of deep importance now: clearness as to redemption, and the peace that belongs to the Christian through divine righteousness, the presence and living power of the Comforter sent down from heaven, the sure and blessed hope of Christ's coming again to receive us to Himself that where He is we shall be also, that we shall be like Himself seeing Him as He is, and that if we die we shall be present with Him, the knowledge that risen with Him we shall be blessed not only through but with Christ, the deep practical identification with Him through our being united with Him by the Holy Ghost. All these things, and many things connected with them, held in the power of the Holy Ghost separate us from the world, shelter the soul by the spiritual possession of Christ glorified, the conscious possession of Christ, from the cavils of current infidelity, and give a living spring to the joy and hope of the whole Christian life. But the expression of the power of them in the heart will manifest itself in devotedness.

Christianity has exercised a mighty influence over the world, even where it is openly rejected, as well as where

it is professedly received. Care of the poor and the supply of temporal wants have become recognised duties of society. And where the truth is not known and Christianity is corrupted, diligent devotedness to this, on the false ground of merit, is largely used to propagate that corruption. And even where infidelity prevails the habits of feeling produced by Christianity prevail, and man becomes the object of diligent, though often of perverted, care. The testimony of the true saint surely should not be wanting where falsehood has imitated the good effects of truth. But there are higher motives than these; and it is of the true character of devotedness I would speak.

I accept as the general rule, that any special call of God apart, Christians should abide in the calling wherein they are called. This is only the place of their walk, its motives and character are behind. These are summed up in one word— Christ. He is at once the life and the object or motive of life in us, giving thus its character to our walk. “To me,” says the apostle, “to live is Christ.” There are two great parts of divine life of which devotedness is one. Both are infinite and unspeakable privileges for us and both perfected by, manifested in, Christ. The one God Himself, the other the actings and display of His nature, as love, the divine witness of His nature which is love. This was seen in Christ. His communion with His Father was perfect, as was His desire to glorify Him. Life to Him here below was life “on account of the Father” (John 6:57). But He was the display, at all cost to Himself, of divine love to men. These could not be separated in His soul. His Father was His continual delight and object, His exercise of love and

display of His Father, of the divine nature by it, constant and perfect. But this was His devotedness.

Another principle must be added to this to complete those which governed His walk: undivided obedience to His Father's will, His having that will for His constant motive. Love to the Father and obedience to Him gave form and character to His love to us. And so it is with us, only that He Himself comes in as the more immediate object, but this in no way hindering the display of the divine nature in love. "Be ye imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love even as Christ hath loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." Note here the fulness of motive and character which is shewn, and how high and blessed that motive and character is. We are followers and imitators of God. We walk in love as Christ loved us. It is the exercise of divine love as displayed in Christ. There is no stint in it. He gave Himself, nothing short of Himself, wholly; a principle often repeated as to Christ, His love to us, for He gave Himself for us. Yet God was the object and motive constituting its perfection: "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." It is thus we are called to walk, to imitate God, to follow Him as He displayed Himself in Christ.

If it be blessed to joy in God, who is love, it is blessed to follow Him in the love He has exercised. Yet as displayed in Christ as a man, it has God Himself for its object: and so with us. The love that descends down from God working in. man rises up always towards and to God as its just and necessary object. It can have nothing lower as its spring, towards whomsoever it is exercised. All the incense of the meat-offering was burnt on the altar,

however sweet the savour to others. This constitutes, as I have said, its essential character and excellence; nor do its just actings in us come short of its actings in Christ. “Hereby,” says John, “know we love, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” There is no question of any cup of wrath for us. Here Christ stood, of course, alone; but all self-sacrifice displayed in Him we are called upon to display, as having His life, Himself, in us.

But I will consider this a little more methodically before I press it hortatively on my brethren. As to reward, as motive or merit, it is clear that any such thought destroys the whole truth of devotedness, because there is no love in it. It is self, looking, like “James and John,” for a good place in the kingdom. Reward there is in Scripture, but it is used to encourage us in the difficulties and dangers which higher and truer motives bring us into. So Christ Himself, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.” Yet we well know that His motive was love. So Moses: “He endured as seeing him who is invisible, for he had respect to the recompense of reward.” His motive was caring for his brethren. So reward is ever used, and it is a great mercy in this way. And every man receives his reward according to his own labour.

The spring and source of all true devotedness is divine love filling and operating in our hearts: as Paul says, “the love of Christ constraineth us.” Its form and character must be drawn from Christ’s actings. Hence grace must first be known for oneself, for thus it is I know love. Thus it is that this love is shed abroad in the heart. We learn divine love in divine redemption. This redemption sets us too, remark, in divine righteousness

before God. Thus all question of merit, of self-righteousness, is shut out, and self-seeking in our labour set aside. “Grace,” we have learnt, “reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ.” The infinite perfect love of God towards us has wrought; has done so when we were mere sinners; has thought of our need; given us eternal life in Christ when we were dead in sins—forgiveness and divine righteousness when we were guilty; gives us now to enjoy divine love, to enjoy God by His Spirit dwelling in us, and boldness in the day of judgment, because as Christ, the Judge, is, so are we in this world. I speak of all this now in view of the love shewn in it. True, that could not have been divinely without righteousness. That is gloriously made good through Christ, and the heart is free to enjoy God’s unhindered love: a love shewn to men in man. For the very angels learn “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.” This knits the heart to Christ, bringing it to God in Him, God in Him to us. We say nothing separates us from this love.

The first effect is to lead the heart up, thus sanctifying it: we bless God, adore God, thus known; our delight, adoring delight, is in Jesus. But thus near to God and in communion with Him, thus not only united, but consciously united, to Christ by the Holy Ghost, divine love flows into and through our hearts. We become animated by it through our enjoyment of it. It is really “God dwelling in us,” as John expresses it; “his love shed abroad in our hearts,” as Paul does. It flows thus forth as it did in Christ. Its objects and motives are as in Him, save that He Himself comes in as revealing it. It is the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; not the less God, but God revealed in Christ, for there we have learnt

love. Thus, in all true devotedness, Christ is the first and governing object; next, “His own which are in the world”; and then our fellow-men. First their souls, then their bodies, and every want they are in. His life of good to man governs ours, but His death governs the heart, “Hereby know we love because he laid down his life for us.” “The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but to him who died for them, and rose again.”

We must note, too, that as redemption and divine righteousness are that through which grace reigns and love is known, all idea of merit and self-righteousness is utterly excluded, so it is a new life in us which both enjoys God and to which His love is precious; which alone is capable of delighting, as a like nature, in the blessedness that is in Him, and in which His divine love operates towards others. It is not the benevolence of nature, but the activity of divine love in the new man. Its genuineness is thus tested, because Christ has necessarily the first place with this nature, and its working is in that estimate of right and wrong which the new man alone has, and of which Christ is the measure and motive. “Not as we hoped,” says Paul (it was more than he hoped), speaking of active charity; “but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God.”

But it is more than a new nature. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost; and God’s love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given to us. And as it springs up like a well in us unto eternal life, so also living waters flow out from us by the Holy Ghost

which we have received. All true devotedness, then, is the action of divine love in the redeemed, through the Holy Ghost given to them.

There may be a zeal which compasses sea and land, but it is in the interest of a prejudice, or the work of Satan. There may be natural benevolence clothed with a fairer name, and irritated if it be not accepted for its own sake. There may be the sense of obligation and legal activity, which, through grace, may lead farther, though it be the pressure of conscience, not the activity of love. The activity of love does not destroy the sense of obligation in the saint, but alters the whole character of his work. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” In God love is active, but sovereign; in the saint it is active, but a duty, because of grace. It must be free to have the divine character—to be love. Yet we owe it all, and more than all to Him that loved us. The Spirit of God which dwells in us is a Spirit of adoption, and so of liberty with God, but it fixes the heart on God’s love in a constraining way. Every right feeling in a creature must have an object, and, to be right, that object must be God, and God revealed in Christ as the Father; for in that way God possesses our souls.

Hence Paul, speaking of himself, says, “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.” His life was a divine life. Christ lived in him, but it was a life of faith, a life living wholly by an object, and that object Christ; and known as the Son of God loving and giving Himself for him. Here we get the practical character and motive of Christian devotedness—living to Christ. We live on account of

Christ: He is the object and reason of our life (all outside is the sphere of death); but this is the constraining power of the sense of His giving Himself for us. So, in a passage already referred to, “The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and he died for all, that they which live should not live to themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again.” They live to and for that, and nothing else. It may be a motive for various duties, but it is the motive and end of life. “We are not our own, but bought with a price,” and have to “glorify God in our bodies.”

What is supposed here is not a law contending or arresting a will seeking its own pleasure, but the blessed and thankful yielding of ourselves to the love of the blessed Son of God, and a heart entering into that love and its object by a life which flows from Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost. Hence it is a law of liberty. Hence too, it can only have objects of service which that life can have, and the Holy Ghost can fix the heart on; and that service will be the free service of delight. Flesh may seek to hinder, but its objects cannot be those the new man and the Holy Ghost seek. The heart ranges in the sphere in which Christ does. It loves the brethren, for Christ does; and all the saints, for He does. It seeks the all for whom Christ died, yet knowing that only grace can bring any of them; and endures “all things for the elect’s sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” It seeks “to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus “; to see the saints grow up to Him who is the Head in all things, and walk worthy of the Lord. It seeks to see the church presented as a chaste virgin unto Christ. It continues in

its love, though the more abundantly it loves, the less it be loved. It is ready to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

The governing motive characterises all our walk: all is judged by it. A man of pleasure flings away money; so does an ambitious man. They judge of the value of things by pleasure and power. The covetous man thinks their path folly, judges of everything by its tendency to enrich. The Christian judges of everything by Christ. If it hinders His glory in oneself or another, it is cast away. It is judged of not as sacrifice, but cast away as a hindrance. All is dross and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. To cast away dross is no great sacrifice. How blessedly self is gone here! “Gain to me “has disappeared. What a deliverance that is! Unspeakably precious for ourselves and morally elevating! Christ gave Himself. We have the privilege of forgetting self and living to Christ. It will be rewarded, our service in grace; but love has its own joys in serving in love. Self likes to be served. Love delights to serve. So we see, in Christ, on earth, now; when we are in glory, He girds Himself and serves us. And shall not we, if we have the privilege, imitate, serve, give ourselves to Him, who so loves us? Living to God inwardly is the only possible means of living to Him outwardly. All outward activity not moved and governed by this is fleshly and even a danger to the soul— tends to make us do without Christ and brings in self. It is not devotedness, for devotedness is devotedness to Christ, and this must be in looking to being with Him. I dread great activity without great communion; but I believe that, when the heart is with Christ, it will live to Him.

The form of devotedness, of external activity, will be governed by God's will and the competency to serve; for devotedness is a humble, holy thing, doing its Master's will; but the spirit of undivided service to Christ is the true part of every Christian. We want wisdom: God gives it liberally. Christ is our true wisdom. We want power: we learn it in dependence through Him who strengthens us. Devotedness is a dependent, as it is a humble spirit. So it was in Christ. It waits on its Lord. It has courage and confidence in the path of God's will, because it leans on divine strength in Christ. He can do all things. Hence it is patient and does what it has to do according to His will and word: for then He can work; and He does all that is done which is good.

There is another side of this which we have to look at. The simple fact of undivided service in love is only joy and blessing. But we are in a world where it will be opposed and rejected, and the heart would naturally save self. This Peter presented to Christ, and Christ treated it as Satan. We shall find the flesh shrinks instinctively from the fact and from the effect of devotedness to Christ, because it is giving up self, and brings reproach, neglect, and opposition on us. We have to take up our cross to follow Christ; not to return to bid adieu to them that are at home in the house. It is our home still, if we say so, and we shall at best be "John Marks "in the work. And it will be found it is ever then "suffer me first!" If there be anything but Christ it will be before Christ, not devotedness to Him with a single eye. But this is difficult to the heart, that there should be no self-seeking, no self-sparing, no self-indulgence! Yet none of these things are devotedness to Christ and to others, but the very opposite. Hence, if we are to live to

Christ, we must hold ourselves dead, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And in point of fact, if the flesh be practically allowed, it is a continual hindrance; and reproach and opposition are then a burden, not a glory. We have with Paul to bear "about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal bodies," and so to have the sentence of death made good in ourselves. Here the Lord's help, through trials and difficulties, comes in. But we are "more than conquerors through him that loved us." Nothing separates us from that love. But if we come to the management of our own heart, we shall find that this "always bearing about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus" is the great difficulty and tests the inward state of the soul. Yet there is no liberty of service nor power but in the measure of it; only, remark, we have this power in the sense of grace. It is the power of the sense we have of His dying and giving Himself for us, which by grace makes us hold ourselves as dead to all but Him. Outwardly it may be comparatively easy, and so is outward labour when self and Satan's power are not felt in opposition. But to have Christ's dying always made good against self, detected by the cross, supposes Christ to be all in the affections. The true power and quality of work is measured by it—the operations of God's Spirit by us. This is the one way of devotedness in G6d's sight, and God's power and the having the mind of Christ in the service we do render. This only is life. All the rest of our life, not to speak of loss or judgment, perishes when our breath goes forth. It belongs to the first Adam and to the scene he moves in, not to the Second. It is only the life which we live by Christ which remains as life.

Its motives and character are twofold: the cross and Christ in glory. The love of Christ constrains us in the cross to give ourselves wholly up to Him who has so loved us, given Himself wholly up for us. The winning Christ and being like Him in glory gives energy, and the spring and power of hope to our path. But how constraining and mighty is the first motive, if we have really felt it! Yet how lowly! It makes us of little esteem to ourselves in the presence of such love. We see we are not our own, but bought with a price. Nor is that all. The sense of the love of Christ takes possession of the heart and constrains us. We desire to live too to Him who gave Himself for us. The perfection of the offering and the absoluteness and perfectness with which it was offered, alike His love to us in it, has power over our souls. "Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God." The sense that we are not our own deepens the claim in our hearts, yet takes away all merit in the devotedness. So wise and sanctifying are God's ways! How does the thought too of winning Him make all around us but dross and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Him! What is all compared with pleasing Him, possessing Him, being with Him and like Him for ever! It puts the value of Christ, as the motive, on everything we do. It leads to true largeness of heart, for all dear to Him becomes precious to us, yet keeps from all looseness of natural feelings, for we are shut up to Christ. What is not His glory is impossible. It puts sin practically out of the heart by the power of divine affections, by having the heart filled with Him. Practically the new nature only lives with Christ for its object.

It applies too, remark, to everything, because we have to please Christ in everything. Dress, worldly manners, worldliness in every shape, disappears; they cannot be alike or agreeable to Him whom the world rejected, because He testified to it that its works were evil. The tone of the mind is unworldly, does not refer to it, save to do good to it when it can. The place of the Christian is to be the epistle of Christ. Christ thus possessing the heart has a circumscribing power. The motives, thoughts, relationships of the world do not enter into the heart. But, Christ moving all within, and all being referred in the heart to Him, it carries its own character in Him out into the world. Kept from the evil, it is the active exercise of good that is in Him, the love of God: the heart shut up to God, but all the blessedness of God going out in the measure in which the vessel contains it.

The love is thus active. Christ has purified to “himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Christ’s love is active, but it is guided by the mind of Christ. It loves the brethren as Christ did; that is, has its spring in itself, not in the object; but feels all their sorrows and infirmities, yet it is above them all so as to bear and forbear, and find in them the occasion of its holy exercises. It is alike tender in spirit and firm in consistency with the divine path, for such was Christ’s love.

It has another character: whatever its devotedness and activity, it is obedience. There cannot be a righteous will in a creature, for righteousness in a creature is obedience. Adam fell, having a will independent of God. Christ came to do the will of Him that sent Him, and in His highest devotedness His path was that of obedience. “The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me, but that the world may know that I love the Father,

and as the Father hath given me commandment, so I do." This both guides in devotedness and keeps us quiet and humble.

Our conclusion, then, is simple undivided devotedness to Christ; Christ the only object, whatever duties that motive may lead to faithfulness in; nonconformity to the world which rejected Him; a bright, heavenly hope connecting itself with Christ in glory, who will come and receive us to Himself and make us like Him, so that we should be as men that wait for their Lord; His love constraining us, in all things caring for what He cares for, Christ crucified, and Christ before us as our hope, the centres round which our whole life turns.

There is another point one may do well to notice, which makes the plain difference between devotedness and natural kindness. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The Lord does not tell them to let their good works shine before men; elsewhere He says the contrary. But their profession of Christ is to be so distinct that men may know to what to attribute their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven. What is wanted among Christians, is that through grace they should be Christians devoted, plainly devoted, in all their ways, devoted in heart and soul to Him who loved them and gave Himself for them.

Genesis 22

Worship always supposes the will broken.

In the preceding chapters we have seen Abraham in Egypt, and we have remarked, that so long as he was there he built no altar; but he came out of it, and then, having abandoned Egypt, he could build an altar to the Lord.

David sees the child sick who is dear to him; then he fasts and prays, but he wrestles with God; his will was not submissive. When the child was dead, David changed his apparel, ate, drank, and could come to worship before the Lord, because the struggle that existed in his heart had ceased, and his will was broken.

Job, after those heavy afflictions, which are set before us in the first chapter, the loss of his substance and of his family, rends his mantle, it is true (chap. 1:20); he did not sin in that, the word tells us. His grief was lawful, he was permitted to grieve for the loss of his children; but he arises and worships before God. He can worship Him, because his will is broken, and he can say, “Jehovah gave and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah.”

But in the chapter we have just read, we find something far above what we have in Job and David. They acquiesced in God’s will, but their submission was passive; it required of them no act. Not so in Genesis 22. Not only must Abraham accept God’s will, but, moreover, he must act against himself; he must, so to speak, sacrifice himself, for the sacrifice of his son was nothing short of that. God says to him, Offer up to me

thy son, thine only son. The name of an individual contains in it for us all that concerns him and all our relations with him. “Thy son”—this word kindled in Abraham the tenderest of feelings; and he had to sacrifice that son! Nay, more; this name recalled to him the promises of God, and it was in this son they were to be fulfilled, for God had positively told him, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”

But he whose will is subjected to God is satisfied of these two things. God will provide for it, and, I am with God. Every look to the flesh in the way of expectation, for the fulfilment of the promises, must be turned away, and God alone remain as the source of the life, the blessings, and the promise; as the One who never comes to the end of His resources, even in the very failure of all the means He Himself might have pointed out for the accomplishment of His promises.

God thus proves the heart, that all confidence in the flesh may be destroyed; but, at the same time, knowing that the heart needs to be sustained under the trial, he sustains it by a new revelation, which enables it to triumph. Thus, we see in Hebrews 11,:19 that Abraham, on the occasion of the sacrifice required of him, had a revelation concerning the resurrection, then so little known. It is thus that God, in His infinite mercy, causes us to gain in Himself what we lose in the flesh.

Far from those that accompanied him (that is, alone with Isaac and with God) Abraham received this revelation, and could offer the ram on the altar in the stead of his son, according as he had said, God will provide Himself a burnt-offering. It is thus that, in the secret of communion with God, we learn much of Him.

In Jesus, the true worshipper of the Father, the will was always broken. The cup was full of bitterness, as we know; but, in His desire to fulfil the will of God, He forgets, so to speak, this bitterness, and cries out, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

Joshua 5

I find a sufficiently palpable difference between the effect of the salvation that Christ has accomplished for us, and that which fits us for the enjoyment of things which are found in the heavenly country. The redemption of Israel was complete as to Pharaoh; it was finished for ever. Israel is introduced into the wilderness perfectly redeemed. It is the same with respect to us. In traversing the desert, Christ is given to us, as cloud, manna, water from the rock, all that is necessary for us. This comes from the pure grace of God. There is no question of conflict in all that, God gives the needful; cloud, manna, and water are always there. Christ is given to meet our every want, and to give us strength to journey through the desert.

If we look to ourselves, we shall find ourselves incapable of enjoying the things which belong to us. Now, it is no longer the question of entering into the wilderness, but of entering Canaan. The Jordan must be passed. Each fault we commit is committed in the presence of the enemy of our souls; it weakens us, and mars our enjoyment. The Christian, inasmuch as he is acting in the heavenly places, is in the enemy s presence; and if he is not faithful, he is incapable of enjoying the promises.

We must cross what stops the way, Jordan, death. It is true that we find there all the power of grace, the ark in the midst of Jordan. Christ has made of death a passage, a way. Death is ours; 1 Cor. 3:22. We can only enjoy the promises of God, so far as we are dead to all here below. Man is accounted dead. Manna continues until Jordan.

Christ is there to give us the strength to go onward. But there is something else, even the enjoyment of the treasures which belong to us in heaven, and to that end we must be dead to all here below. If to-day I do not realise this death, I do not enjoy heavenly things. It is one thing not to find in ourselves the activity of the flesh, and as being in heaven to eat of the growth of the land; it is another thing to traverse the wilderness with Christ for all we need. We are called to the enjoyment of the heavenly places, and to do this we must have crossed the Jordan. It is there we eat of the fruit of the land of promise.

The first thing that Joshua does, before he enters on the career of battles, is to circumcise Israel, which signifies the putting off the body of the flesh, that is, the reproach of Egypt. Before our conversion, we were only carnal; it is the reproach of Egypt, the only fruit of that land. The Israelites are circumcised at Gilgal, which is the practical destruction of all that remained of Egypt up to that time. We must always return to Gilgal, always have the camp there; the evil must there be cut off. Afterwards they celebrated the passover, of which no repeated record is found in the wilderness history, where they were uncircumcised. There is real communion with what Christ has been, which can only take place when a man is circumcised, when the evil is taken away, and we judge ourselves. Here, in order to eat the passover, this must be done at Gilgal. Holiness, without this circumcision, is a terrible thing: with it I enjoy the holiness of God in Christ. The roasted grains of corn represent Christ risen, without having seen corruption. We enjoy it. It is a thing wherewith we are

nourished, and not only what is necessary to us while we are in the wilderness.

But for spiritual warfare and in spiritual enjoyment, we must be dead to this world and to sin; practically, there must be a stripping off of the flesh. We must return to Gilgal, to the judgment of the flesh. These things precede the manifestation of the Captain of Jehovah's host presenting himself for battle. When there has been circumcision, passover, we feed on things which, without that, would have been our death and condemnation; Gen. 17:14; Exod. 12:48. Christ presents Himself to lead us to battle. Inasmuch as He is the Captain of the host, He presents Himself in the same holiness as when He said to Moses, "I am that I am." When He leads His people on to battle and triumph, He is equally the God of holiness as when He accomplished our redemption. This holiness is equally manifested in the conduct of His people. Because of the sin of Achan, He no longer goes up with His people. No difficulties can stand when God is there, and the people cannot stand before their enemies when He is not there.

For the enjoyment of heavenly things, there must be Jordan and Gilgal—death and the putting off of the flesh. There we eat of the fruit of God's land. It is gain and a precious thing to realise our privilege in having done with sin. These two things are true of Christian life: the wilderness and conflict in Canaan. To be strong, we must be dead to the things of the flesh. Then all is ours; Christ is ours, with His holiness and His resurrection. We have the Lord Himself leading us from triumph to triumph, and saying to us, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet."

God grant us grace to profit by the death of Christ, to enjoy the fruit of the land, all we have in Jesus. For this end we must be dead, have the circumcised heart, and return to Gilgal in order that we may possess in our camp the Captain of Jehovah's host. We are weak. What do I say? Weak, since Christ is our strength! May we enjoy what is given to us in our heavenly Canaan!

Psalm 84

The essential thought of this psalm is, the tabernacles of Jehovah. We see that, at all times, the intention and the desire of God were to have a tabernacle; wherefore God shews to Moses on the mountain a pattern of the tabernacle.

In his song respecting the deliverance of Israel, and the miraculous passage of the Red Sea, Moses says, “Jehovah is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation, and I will prepare him an habitation,” a tabernacle; Exod. 15:2. But God says, I will prepare Myself a tabernacle; and at the end of the times, after the millennium, this desire of God shall be accomplished, according as it is spoken in Revelation 21:3: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them.” The word tabernacle has always the sense of a habitation of God with men. Thus David, after having said, “How amiable are thy tabernacles!” adds, “My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.”

“Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.” It was thither that the soul of David looked. According to that providence of God which has prepared a place of rest for every creature, by faith he says, Well then, since Thou hast prepared a nest even for the swallow and the sparrow, Thou hast also prepared one for me; and he adds, “Thine altars, O Jehovah of hosts!” There is the nest or place of rest that he sought. “Thine altars, O Jehovah of hosts!” And, in fact, worship is the rest of the soul.

There is but one man, dear friends, who never had a place of rest. Even as Jesus says, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” And if now we have a nest, a place of rest in God, it is because for our sakes Jesus was without rest on earth.

Verse 4. “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.” Blessed are they, not who visit, or pass through; but blessed are they who dwell in Thy house. And impossible it is to dwell there without praising Him continually.

But, in another sens e, we are not always in the house; we go out for service, as the swallow for food for its young; but (v. 5) there are ways which lead to the house, that is to say, divers ways of God with regard to us, which end at the house. These ways, dear friends, are sometimes stony, thorny, and murderous for the flesh. But they are the ways; and he whose heart is in the house, will prefer the rugged way which leads to it, to the easy way that leads away from it. For example, for the first disciples, the ways were hunger (v. 6), perils, persecution, death, or the valley of Baca, that is to say, all that is most sorrowful; but they “made it a well.” It is thus, dear friends, that all difficulties are changed for those who are on the way; they are made into wells, that is, into sources of joy, blessing, and glory. “The rain also filleth the pools.” Not only the ordinary modes of assistance come to the help of him who is in the way, but even rain, or direct help from God, comes unexpectedly in the midst of the desert.

Verse 7. “They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” There are, as it

were, halting-places on the Christian's road, trials whence fountains spring up, which make him go from strength to strength.

Verse 9. "Behold … and look on the face of thine anointed." We can always present with confidence to God His Anointed, or Christ, and thus comfort ourselves concerning what we ourselves are.

Verse 10. "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Many of God's children are satisfied with being at the door, and there are even some who keep themselves outside, while we ought to enter in and dwell in the house. Yet, if our unbelief, or the lusts of our heart, which desires other objects than God, hinder us from advancing, we have at least "the door," for Christ is "the door"; and "the door," though it be the door only, is worth more than all that is in the world.

Thoughts On 1 Samuel 1 And 2

What is said of Elkanah, who had two wives seems to us to present a type of Christ, and of the two dispensations (Israel and the church). Hannah would represent the Jews taken up again in mercy; Peninnah, the Gentiles set aside. Such is what we may distinguish in the prophetic song of Hannah. We also see the corruption of priesthood, and the judgment of God pronounced against the house of Eli. The priesthood of Aaron and of his sons was a type of the church.

The circumstances of the Jewish people, under Samuel the prophet, Saul and David, until the elevation of Solomon to the throne, figure the preparatory events which introduce the reign of the Messiah; that is, they present in types the principal facts which shall transpire from the time when God recommences to act for His people until Jesus comes to seat Himself on the throne of David at Jerusalem.

The word of God pronounced to Eli is the testimony that God raises up against this priesthood before the execution of His judgment. The church, which has the intelligence of what is going to happen, ought also to bear testimony that God is about to judge and reject the Christianised Gentile body; the judgment of God is about to be accomplished in those who share in the corruption introduced into the church; Jude 15.

It is under the priesthood of Eli and his sons that judgment begins to take place against this order of things. As priest, Eli had no more the discernment required: in such a state, the ear is no longer attentive, so that one can be corrected; also, what is very

remarkable, the sign which is proposed to Eli is the very judgment that God is about to apply; chap. 2:34.

The judgment against Eli's house has its full accomplishment only at the time of Solomon's elevation to the throne; 1 Kings 2:27, 35.. The priesthood established by Solomon is, according to the word of Jehovah, pronounced to Eli by the man of God, "a faithful priest … who shall walk before mine anointed for ever," 1 Sam. 2:35. The accomplishment of this type presented under the royalty of Solomon, will have place when Christ shall be seated on the throne of His glory at Jerusalem; it is the priesthood which is mentioned in the description of the order of the temple; Ezek. 44:15.

Aaron and his sons represented the heavenly priesthood in the character and position which Jesus took by His resurrection; the position of the church is that of Christ, the glorified Man before God the Father. That which is indicated as replacing what is rejected is "before his anointed." It is a priesthood in another position. The first is heavenly; it is what was figured in the tabernacle, the pattern of heavenly things; Heb. 9:24. The other is on earth for the temple at Jerusalem, in the days when the Messiah shall be seated on the throne of David. This priesthood shall not fall, any more than the restored Jewish people, because Christ will have taken the government in hand. That which was placed in the hands of man under responsibility has fallen in every dispensation; but God, according to His grace, maintained His election. Unto Him be all the glory.

An instruction of the highest importance for us Gentiles springs out of chapter 2:27, 28. Before executing judgment on that which is corrupted, God ever recalls

the nature of His calling according to His grace, as regards the blessing placed in the hands of the men who have been the objects of His goodness. God says to Eli, “Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy fathers, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house?” etc. The house of Aaron had been the object of a very special grace in the midst of the tribes of Israel. But this grace they had forgotten; and, therefore, having ceased to retain the memory of God’s goodness toward them, they were fallen into a state of complete corruption, and accordingly judgment is the last remedy that God applies, whether to correct or to cut off irrevocably.

It is just the same as regards the church. It also has forgotten the goodness of God, according to the calling of His grace; also this dispensation is about to be irrevocably cut off by the final judgment of Babylon; Rev. 18. It is then of the highest importance for the Christian not to be forgetful of God’s grace as regards his initial calling: let us remember whence God has taken us, in order to avoid the application of the threat of Jesus to Laodicea, “I will spue thee out of my mouth,” Rev. 3:16.

The Wish Of Paul In Chains

Acts 26

It is much, dear friends, to say with Paul to Agrippa, “I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds,” v. 29.

There is what the apostle could say from the bottom of his heart to those who surrounded him, that they might be such as he was, without his bonds. He might have answered to Agrippa, who had said to him “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” v. 28. Would to God that thou wert. The answer would have been good and according to charity; but it would not have presented us with a state such as that expressed by the words of the apostle, whose heart, full of joy, overflows with this charitable wish. A happy heart does so naturally.

The apostle was pressed to say what he knew, that is, to express what was passing in a heart which enjoyed its position in God. His soul was so happy that he could desire the same thing for others of which he had the consciousness for himself. Joy is always full of good-will; divine joy, of love. But more; this wish describes to us the state of the apostle’s soul, notwithstanding his circumstances. Notwithstanding his confinement, which had already lasted more than two years, his heart was completely happy; it was a happiness of which he himself could render a reason; and all that he could desire was that those who heard him, even the king, were such as he was, except those bonds.

Such is the effect of the strange happiness that is produced in a soul wherein Christianity is fully received. It possesses a happiness which in principle leaves nothing to be desired, and which is always accompanied by that energy of love which is expressed by the wish that others were such as itself. We see moreover here, that it is a happiness which outward circumstances cannot touch; it is a fountain of joy springing up within the soul. The whole outward position of the apostle was but ill calculated to produce joy. He had long been prepared to expect bonds and tribulations; but none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry he had received to testify the gospel of the grace of God; See Acts 20.

Paul had been taken and led to the castle because of the violence of the people. He had been dragged from tribunal to tribunal. He had languished two years in prison, obliged to appeal to Caesar. And, to sum up his history, he was a man that might have been supposed to be worn, harassed as he was, pressed on all sides by all that can break the heart and daunt the courage. But there is nothing of this: he speaks before the tribunal of what he came to do at Jerusalem, and not of his sufferings. He was in the midst of all these things, as he says himself, exercising himself to keep always a conscience void of offence before God and man. All the difficult circumstances through which he passed were idle to him, and did not reach his heart; he was happy in his soul; he desired nothing but this happiness for himself or others, and the happiness which fills with perfect satisfaction is surely a remarkable happiness. True, he was bound with chains, but the iron of his

chains reached not his heart; God's freed-man cannot be bound with chains. And he desired nothing else, neither for others nor for himself, save this complete enfranchisement by the Lord. All he could wish was that all might be altogether such as he was, without his bonds.

We are going to examine what gives this happiness, this tranquillity, which leaves nothing to be desired. We may have joy to a certain point, but not peace, when there is something to be desired. In Paul was to be seen a perfect happiness. A free and ardent love was found in it. Doubtless, he had not already attained to perfection, as he said himself, "I count not myself to have apprehended"; but there was happiness and love. He possessed a perfect happiness, and, being "before kings and governors," surrounded by all their pomp, he wished for them that they might be such as he was; and his testimony was so powerful, that Agrippa could say to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Persons may be found here, all whose circumstances are painful, who have anguish of heart. Well, Paul was in a position to be "of all men most miserable"; not only did he suffer, but his work was stopped. He could not attend to what concerned the dear flock of the Lord; every spring of happiness that he might have sought in these cases as a resource failed him. But although, according to man, he might have had good reason to complain, he is there a model of happiness. That which he enjoyed was independent of all outward circumstances, for they were not what rendered him happy.

There are persons who imagine that, if such and such circumstances met together, they might be happy. But

this could not have procured Paul the happiness that he possessed: God alone was the source from whence he could have drawn it. We may have sorrows, but the happiness which we have just spoken of will not be troubled by them; and we have need, dear friends, of the firmness of this happiness, for if we knew the circumstances of this life, whether among the rich, or among the poor, we should see that sorrows never fail. But, returning to relations with God, we are going to see the source whence Paul drew his happiness.

Before his conversion, he possessed not this happiness. His privileges as a Jew could not give it to him. He had a good conscience as a man, but ill enlightened: he did things which he thought he ought to do against Jesus; v. 9, 10. Conscience is so often falsified by education (and this was his case), that he followed its directions and obeyed its dictates; and, through that very thing, he opposed Christ with all his might. He did conscientiously what was the greatest possible iniquity. As for the rest, he was well instructed in the religion of his fathers, a Pharisee after the “most straitest sect,” very active, and distinguished for his zeal. He had been taught at the feet of Gamaliel, he was directed by the high priest (v. 12), and in open war with the Lord Jesus; v. 14, 15. With all our conscience, our religion, our learning, and the approbation of the doctors of this world, we may be at open war with the Lord.

The enjoyment of all these advantages does not hinder us from being bankrupt before God. And it is a terrible and painful thing to be bankrupt before God; and so much the more, as the things we have so much esteemed not only do not support us, but are found to have been the instruments of the blinding of our souls.

Although the apostle had a good conscience, was pious and directed by wise men, all these advantages had served in the issue only to place him in open war against God. One may boast and glory, no one can say anything against us (and it is the saying of many people); and finally one discovers that all this has led us to make war against the Lord.

The flesh has its religion, as its lusts; it does everything to hinder the conscience from meeting God. When Paul acted in the flesh, he was satisfied with himself, and, with the help of the good he did, that settled his affair. The religion that the flesh uses is put into the balance to make weight; if conscience says, Thou hast not been quite what thou shouldst have been, the religion which adds certain forms, certain ceremonies, that the flesh can accomplish, puts all into the balance, tranquillises itself, and rests there: this is not faith, for faith draws nigh to God. One has no religion before God, one has a conscience convicted of sin, and one is too much occupied about the judgment of God upon it to think of one's religion; rather, one has none; and there is not one person here who, if he were in God's presence, could think of his religion. Worldly piety only serves when we need it not. When we do need it, whether before the justice of God, or on account of a broken heart, it is nought; it has only served as a means to turn us away from the consciousness of our need as sinners, which consciousness, through the grace which produces it, would have led us to the true remedy, to that which would have done us true service in the hour when it would have been necessary for us.

What made Paul happy? It was indeed the truth, but not immediately, for he found that he had made war against

God, when he met the Lord on the way to Damascus. Hitherto he had been content, but no farther. See chap. 9. The Lord Jesus manifests Himself in glory to him, and convinces him of sin. He is three days without eating or drinking, upset as he was by meeting the Lord; he was not then in the position to say, “I would that not only thou, but all that hear, were such as I am.”

The Lord sends him to Damascus to hear the word of truth; and after three days’ sufferings, produced by the conviction that this Jesus, against whom he wrestled with so much fury, was the Lord, the same Lord sends Ananias to him, and then we see how complete was his conversion. From an enemy he becomes the friend of Jesus, and the apostle of grace. This is what God does: of a persecuting “Saul” He makes a “Paul,” powerful witness of the love of Jesus.

Paul had been conscientious and very zealous for the religion of his fathers; but with all his conscience and his religion an enemy of God. He was the most wicked, and, as he says himself, the “chief” of sinners. And, nevertheless, there he is; he becomes in three days the most remarkable apostle of grace—and how did that happen? It is a very simple thing. He had become acquainted with Jesus. He could not at once manifest what he would be; for he had been terrified at seeing the state of death wherein he was, but he had heard in his heart the voice of Jesus.

Jew or Gentile, it is all the same, while the soul is unstripped, the conscience unconvinced of sin, and the man has not understood that all his religion is but enmity against God. The conviction of sin does not come to all in the same way; there are different

circumstances, but it must always be that result in the soul being stripped, and that Christ reveals to the soul His relations with His own.

There are poor Christians, dishonoured by those who are in consideration, designated by injurious titles; well, to these persons despised and pointed at because of their faith, the Lord reveals His relations with them in a manner most positive and clear. The revelation that Jesus made to Paul is, that they are entirely identified with Himself. He says, I am all those men whom thou persecutest. Paul sees the glory, and he is arrested; no doubt that it is the Lord. But this Lord is Jesus, who shews him that he persecutes Him in persecuting the Christians. It is Myself, says Jesus, “whom thou persecutest.”

There were in those days differences in faith, patience, and piety, amongst the Christians; but Jesus bears them all on His heart. He says, It is Myself. And there is a complete revolution in Paul, learned, religious, and a persecutor. The more there is of religion of the flesh, the greater enemies we are to Jesus. The finer the outside, the more honest and brave I give myself out for, exactly so much the more I am God’s enemy, and so much the more opposed to the grace of Jesus. He who wallows in sin will not pretend to be the friend of God, to be reconciled with Him.

But as for those who have believed, Christ identifies Himself with them. In this room there are those who believe, and others who do not believe. Amongst those who believe there are (without doubt) many degrees of spirituality, but I can say of all these latter ones, they are one with the Lord Jesus. It is evident that this simple

truth changes all in the state of the soul—the being one with Him who is in glory.

Paul has been later caught up to the third heaven, and had precious revelations. When he was arrested on the road to Damascus, he had yet much progress to make, for he even thought himself lost, till Ananias had explained and made him understand that Jesus wanted of him. See Acts 22:14. Then Ananias said to Paul, “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.” But from the moment that he truly knew the Lord Jesus, he was one with Him, and he knew it.

Whatever, then, might be the circumstances of Paul, whether at Jerusalem, at Caesarea, before Festus, or before Caesar, he could say, “I would that you were such as I am, except these bonds”; for he knew what he possessed in Christ. It was a question of this truth, the being one with Christ. Of course, Paul had yet a great deal to learn of the Lord, but in spite of that, he was one with Him; he had understood that in persecuting the Christians, the beloved of Jesus, he was persecuting Jesus: “Why persecutest thou me?” The nearer we are to the Lord Jesus, the better we understand that he who touches His brethren “toucheth the apple of his eye.”

I will add a few words more on what we are in Jesus. All in us has been enmity against God, our religion, our works, our whole conduct, so that in this state it is impossible to please Him. It is sad, but, after all, it is true. Paul admits it; he no longer esteems what he thought was “gain”; on the contrary, he looks upon it “as

dung." But he understands that by faith all are one in Christ. Faith makes him take his place with them. He does not ask if he has faith, he does not begin a metaphysical discussion to know what faith is; but he becomes a Christian, because he believes that Christians are one with the Lord. And this is the life and joy of our souls, to comprehend that Christ has not asked us if we have faith, but that He has said, I am one with thee.

All was sin in this world. There was no longer any means of entering into relations with God, and it was necessary, in order that these relationships should be re-established, that Jesus should come into the world to accomplish the will of God, and to manifest to sinful men the deep interest that God took in them. But in this case I have nothing to do but to weigh what Christ is for me, and that is all my business. I find in Him that which takes away all my mistrust, because He knows me altogether. He knows my sin better than I know it myself; in going to Him, my heart is free, because He knows all, and that He is come expressly for that. I find all liberty, all grace, and all goodness in Him.

Moreover, knowing that He is God, I know Him as the Saviour God. And what a revolution takes place in the soul which knows that it has to do with the God who never denies Himself, and who is love! Not only is He come to relieve me, but more, to save me. And what is exceedingly precious is, that when I have met the man Jesus, I have met God; I am one with Him, not upon the cross (there He had taken my place), but in all His privileges. He has taken up the cause for me as a sinner, and has given Himself as a propitiatory victim for sin. God cannot sue again for my salvation, because I am one with Christ there in heaven; and if I torment myself, it is

only with myself, for I cannot have the least uneasiness before God.

Satan has done all he could, but it is only to shew that his power is destroyed for ever; there is nothing remaining which can disquiet me before God. He has everything to be the source of life and joy. I find all in Jesus, in whom “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” I find in Him all grace for my need, my strength, and my righteousness.

Another righteousness has succeeded that of man; it is the righteousness of God. Christ is become Head of all things, and all the glory is manifested at the right hand of God, as a consequence of the expiation which has been made for my sin. Thus all the fulness is manifested, and Jesus had said, being glorified, that He is one with us, and that He has sent His Holy Spirit to make us understand it. Christ has said of us, It is I. And I have only to examine what Christ is, and to rejoice too in seeking to manifest what He is, since He has said of His own, It is I.

The Holy Spirit is given to be in the heart of these poor worthless ones, the “seal” and the “earnest of the inheritance.” When one has the Holy Spirit, is one not uneasy about oneself? Quite the contrary; for then we are one with Christ, who considers us as “his own flesh,” and who looks after us; sometimes, perhaps, He must wound it a little, but He does so because He cannot neglect it, since it is His flesh. And the Holy Spirit makes us alive to all that, with which Jesus is not satisfied in us as being one with Him, His body; and the nearer we are to Him, the more alive we are to these things. Besides the fact of being one with Jesus, in order fully to enjoy

this privilege, and that the heart might overflow with joy in the consciousness of possessing it, the Holy Spirit must not be grieved. If the heart of Paul had not been set at liberty, although the truth of his oneness with Christ remained, he could not have said, I would that all should be such as I am. His understanding would have recognised the truth of it, apart from sin; his heart could not have said it by the Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit is not crushed either by prison or by any kind of tribulation. Nothing hinders Paul from enjoying the grace of Jesus. He was able to call himself happy in every circumstance, and to say to those who heard him, I would that all were such as I am, etc.

When Agrippa says to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” if this had been addressed to us, what had been our answer? Perhaps we should have said, Would to God that thou wert! but could we have said, I would that thou wert such as I am, etc.? This shews the inward happiness he possessed. Oh! happy is the man that can say so! and all can say it in Christ, for Christ has said of all, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest!” But, if we are not close to Christ, in Paul’s state, we are not at liberty.

Alas! there may be many things in the life of the poor Christian which oblige Christ to chastise him, and there is a diversity in the manifestation of His love, but this changes not the truth. He is one with me. The Christian sees in God all goodness towards him, and, as a sinner, nothing but grace. There is in Christ the righteousness of God, the life of God, the glory of God, and that in Christ which declares him one with Him, and which says of him, It is I. He has the Holy Spirit that he may understand Him, and enjoy Him, and that he may know

by this “earnest” that the fellowship and happiness of God are his for ever, and according to the sweetness of the peace which assures him of it. Is it, then, astonishing that, filled with love, he cries out, “I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds!”

Being in the presence of God destroys whatever we have put to hinder the conscience from being alive. With all your religion, would you be naked before God, before whom every veil is rent? All that we put before us to hinder us from seeing God, all the care, all the pleasures, all our religion, disgust us, when the conscience is awakened.

Are you content that your consciences should be naked before God? If it be so, Christ can say to you, You are one with Me, and God is occupied about you, because you are one with Me, like those of whom He said, “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.”

May God give us grace, dear friends, to comprehend this truth, so powerful, so blessed to our souls.

Are You Praising With Christ?

Psalm 22

In the first Adam all men failed, and came under condemnation. We have failed; I have failed; not only do I belong to a world of sin, but I am a sinner. If I am honest, as to my state, I shall own I am under condemnation. It is not enough to say all men are sinners, but I am a sinner. “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest,” etc. All men in their reason own they are sinners; but this is another thing altogether. I must learn that I am a sinner, and that God and sin cannot go together. Man, by nature, is in darkness, and light and darkness have no connection with each other. Man in the flesh is lost, not only because he is a sinner, but because he is in a sinful condition; there is mercy for him, it is true, but his position is ruin. He is not now in a state of probation. Once God did try him. He was in a state of probation until Christ came.

We must get back to our starting-point, and then we shall see man in himself, lost, ruined, without hope, without help, until he rests in Christ, and then he is saved. Man is lost; this is his condition. Ruin is where he starts from, as involved by Adam in condemnation. The believing man is taken up out of this place, in virtue of the second Adam. This is the grace of the gospel. All now depends upon Christ. Man got out of paradise, the place of earthly blessing, and he never can get back again. I cannot get there; but I have received the same place of dignity Christ has gained; not the paradise Adam lost, which was earthly: our place of blessing in

Christ is heavenly; and what is before us is the ground and way of our blessing. We have Christ as the object of our faith, and we have Him as the effect in salvation. Called upon to believe that Christ died upon the cross, we hear God saying, You are saved—not you may be, or you shall be, but you are. “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life.” We shall see how completely that work on the cross was done.

The first thing, when men fell, was the word that Another should come— “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” It is not a promise made to Adam, but a revelation in his hearing that his faith could take hold of, that Another should come. When Adam sinned, he was turned out of paradise, and all his posterity with him, and he never can take his place there again. Being in heaven is not blessedness in the garden of Eden. There is no going back to a state of innocence; that is impossible. If we have once done evil, we never can return to innocency. Christ came, the promised Seed of the woman, which Adam was not. To Abraham God had promised that in his seed, Which was Christ, all the families of the earth should be blessed. It was unconditional, a settled thing, irrespective of man’s righteousness. It was God’s own act, and according to His way. The promise rested not on man’s responsibility. I will do it, says God. It was independent of man’s righteousness; nor is it that God is indifferent about righteousness: the flood settles that.

After the promise was given, God brought in the law, to raise the question of righteousness in man, and to make known his responsibility. It was not grace reigning through righteousness, but law claiming righteousness. Have you got this? The law says, Have you done what

God requires? The law says, You should love God with all your heart; have you done it? The natural conscience tells you that it is right to do so. The world also pushes you, and says you ought; but you are without power. The question of righteousness has been raised by the law, to prove that every motion of our nature is sin. The law says, Do, and you shall live; obey, and you shall have life; but it does not give power, it leaves you without strength to meet its claims.

“What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin but by the law.” What does this mean? Would God give a law that man could not keep? why should He give it? This is the working of the natural reason. Why was the law given? That sin may abound. “I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” Man finds out that he cannot keep the law, and he must get to this point. The apostle, as man, says, “The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, and sold under sin.” This is not exactly the right place. He must get further still: “That which I do I allow not; for what I would that I do not.” And it is worse than even this: “What I hate, that I do.” All must come to this place. We must find out that we are without strength, and cannot get help through the law; but we are slow to learn this lesson. God never meant to save by the law. The law was given between the promise and its fulfilment to test man, to shew out what was in his heart. And this is the case often with us, after we have grace; the law comes and shews us our sin, but gives us no help; it only makes us cry, “O wretched man that I am.” There is the end of all strivings. I am in a ditch, and I have to cry out, Who shall deliver me? It is too late to

help myself, I cannot get up. Where can I turn to? To whom can I look?

Now I am come to the point: “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Now it is the question of the worth of Another. It is no longer, What shall J do, but what has been done by Another? If the law could have given life, then Christ would not have died. There was no life in the law; that has been proved. The first thing Israel did, after the law was given, was to make a golden calf. Man failed under the law; and then comes another thing j not a promise, but much more, the Yea and Amen of all the promises, Jesus Christ. To Abraham’s seed was the promise made, but they could not inherit it by the law; had this been the case, it would have been no more of promise.

When Christ came, there was one sad thing more to be made known—that man’s will was altogether wrong. Had it been only a question of power, Christ had power for anything; He could have broken the devil’s power, He could bind the strong man, open the prison doors, and let the captive free, had that been all. But there was another awful truth to come out: “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” “We will not have this man to reign over us.” “He is despised and rejected of men.”

Thus we get the whole history of man. There man, as man, ends: there you, by nature, were. Without law, you were lawless; under law, you were rebellious. Then God sent His Son, saying, Surely you will reverence Him: but you deliberately killed the Lord of glory. Now try your own hearts. Has not this been your state? Is it now your state? You think you ought to be righteous, and that is

true; but you are slow to learn the lesson that you are without power; that help must come through another.

There are two distinct aspects of Christ's sufferings. They are of a double character. The one was for righteousness, and brings judgment; the other for sin, and brings blessing. In this Psalm 22, He is suffering from God, for sin, and it ends with nothing but blessing. The heart of God is seen delighting in blessing. The first aspect of Christ's suffering is from man: it is man against God manifest in the flesh. Christ suffered, because He was righteous and for righteousness* sake, from the hands of men. He suffered for God. "For thy sake I have borne reproach. The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." In all these sufferings, it is our privilege to suffer with Him. Alas! how little fellowship we have with Christ in His sufferings! But every sorrow He passed through from the hands of men brings down judgment on them. We get the character of it in Psalm 21: "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies; thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee." "Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven," etc. Christ is now in an expectant state at God's right hand, waiting to take vengeance on those His enemies, who, with wicked hands, have crucified Him. It is the effect of these sufferings from man that He gets the promise of having His enemies made His footstool.

Psalm 22 is altogether another thing; not so much suffering from the hands of man, though there are bulls of Bashan, it is true, but a wholly different kind of sufferings here. His cry now is, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" He repeats it: "O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. Be not far from me, for trouble is near." In all His

sufferings from the hands of man the face of God was upon Him, but now His face is turned away. Why did God forsake Him? Was it for His righteousness, His holiness, His love? No. “He was made sin.” When He suffered for righteousness’ sake, He was representing God before man; but when He suffered for sin, He was representing man before God. He was forsaken of all; man fled; God hid His face. He was alone when He drank the cup of wrath, and those sufferings brought nothing but blessing.

If man was to be delivered, Christ must take his place before God. He must stand in the sinner’s stead, and there and then He cries, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” Why was He forsaken? That I might be owned; that sinful man may be delivered; that sin may be put away. Nothing that He suffered from the hands of man made Him cry, “Save me from this hour”; but the effect of those sufferings was of a totally different character. Suffering for man brings grace, and peace, and blessing. Sin is put away, and for ever gone. The believing man is delivered. We have died with Him; we have done with wrath. The power of Satan is broken. Christ took my place as a sinner. Grace brought Him to it. I met God at the cross in Him. I must meet God. Have you done it? Can you meet Him in nature? If you own the truth, you know that you cannot.

Christ had to go to the horns of the unicorn when He represented man. Man’s heart was at enmity with God, and Christ must go to the place of judgment that man might be delivered. “Save me from the lion’s mouth,” etc. (v. 21). When He had been to the very transit of death, He could say, “Thou hast heard me.” The whole work was done. He bore the wrath. Christ settled all

that was against man. He drank the cup; He endured the cross; and when that transverse spear entered His side, out flowed grace and peace and blessing. The gospel testimony can go forth. Righteousness is satisfied. Justice cannot claim more. God's requirements are met, and now He is righteous and just to forgive sin. Christ had sin on Him once, but He does not exist in that state any longer. He died for sin once. He is gone up to heaven, and He did not take sin with Him. God was bound in righteousness to take Him to heaven. Christ had a twofold title to be there— one in His own right as Son of God, the other because as Son of man He had finished God's work. He is now "sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." God's righteousness set Him there; and where He is, there I am. My unchangeable righteousness is in heaven. I am immovably there.

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren," v. 22. When Christ rose from the grave He declared God's new name — the God that raises the dead. He first sees Mary Magdalene, and He says to her, "Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father," etc. He had never so called them "brethren" before. "Touch me not," He says to Mary. I am not going to set up the kingdom yet; I will do that by-and-by. I am come now to declare God's new name. He is the God of resurrection—My God and your God. I took your sins, and you have the same place I have. How completely His work was done! It not only entitled Him to sit in God's presence, but He thereby associates His brethren with Himself. Where He is, you are; and what He has, you have.

But there is yet more than this: “In the midst of the congregation I will praise thee.” After Christ had declared God’s new name, He could only praise, He could not but praise. He will lead, and we should follow. “My praise shall be of thee.” He will sing praises and then He will sing with us. In the midst of the congregation He praises, and then in “the great congregation.” Christ associates His beloved bride with Himself, in all His glory (save His Godhead). He adorns her with all the blessings His completed work had effected. He has united her to Himself, and He would not, we may say, be happy in heaven without her. Do you know the love God has for Christ? If you do, He has the very same love for you. Christ, in communion with His Father, gives two reasons why He would have us in heaven: first, that we should behold His glory: and then, “that the world may know that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” Do you believe that? If you do not, it is positive unbelief.

God loves me as He loves Christ. I dare to say that. He has glorified God by taking my place. It was a true transfer. He has suffered, and we are saved—not by our responsibilities, but by His work. He has taken us out of the ditch. We have done with judgment. Who is to judge us? Can Christ judge Himself? Will He judge those that are His, or condemn His own work? When He sits in judgment, we shall be seated on thrones around Him. When He takes up Israel, we shall reign with Him.

“The meek shall eat and be satisfied,” etc. (v. 26). There is nothing but blessing for those that have found Christ. Have you found Him? or do you say you are seeking Him? Well, it is a blessed thing to see a man seeking. But Christ suffered for sin, and He must see of the

travail of His soul. He says, “They shall praise the Lord that seek Him”; but there is no praising until you have found Him.

“All the ends of the world shall remember,” etc. (v. 27-29). Christ is not content with having the church with Him, and seeing Israel in a state of blessing; He must bring in the millennial glory. He will take up high and low— “all the kindreds of the nations”; “all they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship; all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him.” All the redeemed shall join in this song: “He hath done this.”

It is all grace for us, the judgment Christ took. He could say, “I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?” He could not declare God’s new name until He had passed through death. Life, light, and love flow to us from His grave. He could not say, “My Father and your Father” before the resurrection. Do you know the risen Christ? This is the gospel. “If Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your sins.” Have your hearts found rest in a risen Saviour? Can you claim a part in the praises in the midst of the great congregation? Christ came not only to put away sin, but to condemn sin in the flesh. Have you learnt the lesson that the flesh is irreconcilably bad and cannot be mended? You may take it to the third heavens, and then it will be proud.

Well, are you seeking Him? Christ is full of love. Come and praise Him.

The Communion Of Abraham With God

Genesis 15 and 17

It is lovely enough to see God's ways of grace and condescension. He could come down and talk with Abraham, He would eat with him. But for us it is another thing: we are called upon to feed on Christ Himself, "the bread of God that came down from heaven."

Promises end in myself; they minister to my need: "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." This is most sweet and precious, and we feel the need of such a promise; but when we look at all these promises, we think of what we get for ourselves, and then our horizon is limited by what we need. In Genesis 15 God says to Abraham, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." The word "thy" would bring the thought of self and of his need; it was what God was for Abraham, as One who could meet all his need.

On the other hand, in chapter 17 we have what He is Himself. The effect of God's revealing Himself to Abraham as his shield and his exceeding great reward was, that Abraham at once turned to the thought of his own need, and said, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me?" But directly God reveals Himself (Gen. 17), Abraham falls on his face, and God talks with him. It produces a closer, holier character of communion. And then, too, Abraham is not asking, "what wilt thou give me?" but he is able to intercede for others—he is taken out of himself.

It is sweet, again, to get back to what it was at first, and to see God able, as it were, to come down to the “tent door in the heat of the day.” God came in the cool of the day to Paradise (Gen. 3), but it was in vain, as far as communion was concerned—Adam hid himself away. There should be a going of the soul to God in a far more intimate way than to any one else. Communion with saints is precious; but I must have intimacy of communion with God above all; and communion of saints will flow from communion with God. Then the soul, getting into this wonderful place of communion with God, takes His likeness. “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” While there is dependence upon God learnt by need, still there is a deeper thing, a forming into the image of God by the soul’s getting near to Him, and finding its delight in Him. This was, in a sense, true even of Christ Himself. The ways of the Father were reproduced in His ways down here, through the communion which He had with Him.

There were two things in the way in which God revealed Himself in chapter 17. First, there is the outspreading of grace to the Gentiles, “Thou shalt be a father of many nations”; because if He is the Almighty God He could not be cooped up, if we may so say, in Israel. The second thing is, I will be a God “unto thee, and unto thy seed after thee”; that is, more intimacy of communion, immediate relationship with God Himself. The nearer we get to Christ, the more shall we enter into this.

Wherever the heart was cast upon what Jehovah was in Himself, He must go beyond Israel; this title over-reached all the barriers. It is not the law, but in contrast

with it, circumcision and promise without condition; though along with it, Abraham has principles made obligatory on him and his seed, which express the character of such as enjoy God's promises. (Compare John 7:22, and Rom. 4:10-13.) Circumcision set forth the mortification of the flesh; but this, not as a legal binding, though peremptorily enjoined as a confession of what man is, whatever may be the grace of God. In fact, nothing so condemns the flesh as that grace. As a matter of daily life, I am brought to trust in God Himself as the sole spring and source of all my blessing and strength. God revealed Himself to Abraham, and then said, "walk before me, and be thou perfect." Here is what I am: now that is what you are to be in answer to me.

We see what a blessed thing it is to be loved of God. We have got God Himself in Christ, and that is our eternal life. When we see Christ walking through this world, our souls are attracted by the loveliness of all His ways; they delight in and admire all that we see, and get their life and happiness there. "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children." As a child of God, I have got the family likeness.

We do want promises; they are most precious, as meeting our need. But God's revelation of Himself is a creative power, which renews me into His own image. "I am thy shield"; then Abraham's heart turns upon himself, and therefore he says, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me?" God puts Himself forward as able to answer Abraham's wants, and then Abraham comes out with his wants. This is most beautiful and precious. It is what we have in 1 Chronicles 17:24. David wished that the God of Israel should be all that God could be to Israel. In 2 Corinthians 6:18, we find the two names by

which God had made Himself known, Shaddai and Jehovah; but now that the Son is come, He takes the place of the Father. He who was “the Almighty “to the patriarchs, and “the Eternal” to Moses and the people, will now be a Father to us who believe. Genesis 15 accordingly ends with the earth. (See verses 13-21.) It is the promise to Israel, in connection with the land, and hence speaks of their suffering in Egypt, and of their deliverance by the divine judgment of their oppressors. It is an astonishing favour that God should thus come down and put Himself at our disposal. He binds Himself to Abraham by covenant, by death. We get the same principle in Philippians 4, “My God shall supply all your need”: which is most sweet. Then Paul can say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” But still the thought here is of need, and of the power of God to supply it all.

Joy in God is communion, and a deeper thing; presenting a want to God (as in Gen. 15) is not communion. “God talked with Abraham,” “his friend”—this is communion. What a different idea we are apt to have of God! Communion with God is the retiring place of the heart. It is essential for a soul to be brought into perfect confidence in God Himself, in order to a walk with God.

Promise always comes before law, and raises no question of righteousness at all. There was no question raised here as to the fitness of Abraham. Law does raise the question of righteousness, and God therein assumes the character of a judge. But now, under grace, it is even more than promise. “We are made the righteousness of God in Christ.” Here, then, is an object worthy of God to delight in, and I bask in the sunshine; God looks at me just as He looks at Jesus.

Paul had seen Christ in glory—the pattern-man in heaven; and therefore he, as it were, says, I cannot rest till I am that. “The power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3) means, that no difficulties can stand in the way, because Christ has been raised from the dead. Everywhere and in all things the power of God to meet all need abounded. But afterwards (Phil. 4) we come to “his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” It is just so in Genesis 17.

If I am risen with Christ, and am walking in the power of His resurrection, what is all the world to me? Paul would not merely not have his sins, but he would not have his own righteousness; he was raised clean out of everything that he had valued as a man and as a Jew. This we have to learn often in the midst of failure, and in the details of everyday life. In principle the Christian is dead to all here, and has got a new life altogether. Christ never had a motive that the earth suggested; He walked through the world with divine motives. The thing in which the disciples were following Christ so tremblingly is what the apostle says he wants to have; namely, “to know the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” He does not count himself to have apprehended, nor to have attained, till he reaches resurrection. He goes on getting more and more; but he has not got it in full till the resurrection. Just as we may imagine a lamp before us at the end of a straight path; we have more and more of the light as we go along the road, but not the lamp itself till we reach it. But the Christ that we get then is the Christ that we have got already.

It is well that a nature is really given to us independent of its development; there is such a poor display of it in

our ways before men. Where is the “bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus?”

How wonderful for a man in prison like Paul to say, he can do everything. Many have triumphed in prison through God’s grace, but still had a feeling as if they were shut out from service, and chastening was come upon them. Paul’s being in prison may have been in some sense a chastening; but in his case the chastening came, to use a homely phrase, upon good stuff—upon a man with a single eye; and so it only purged away dross, and made him see clearer.

Abraham And Lot

Genesis 18 and 19

The destruction of Sodom is a figure of what will happen when the Lord comes. They carried themselves as if the world was to last for ever. Such is still the great sin of the world, and what marks the incredulity of the heart; 2 Peter 3. Men make all possible arrangements for the future; and yet, since the death of Jesus, the world cannot count upon a single day. God is waiting till the iniquity of the earth reaches its height, till it is all out and open before He exercises judgment. The world takes advantage of this. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil,” Eccles. 8:11. It is the principle and the practice of infidelity all through: it was the history of the antediluvians and of the doomed cities of the plain; Luke 17:26-30.

The church, the Christian, has properly but one object—Christ in heaven, and therefore is called to be in heart separated from everything here below. Abraham, as far as he was a stranger and pilgrim on earth, is the type of the faithful; Heb. 11. He saw the promises afar off, was persuaded of them, embraced them, and confessed himself a pilgrim here below. Of such God is not ashamed to be called their God. He would be ashamed to own as His people those who make this world their fatherland. “And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned: but now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.” Abraham had only

a burying-place in the land of Canaan. As he followed God in the main faithfully, God took a particular interest in him: Abraham is called “the friend of God.” There is no uncertainty in his movements. He quits Ur of the Chaldees; he and his leave Haran subsequently. “They went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.”

On the other hand, Lot’s wife (“remember Lot’s wife”) left Sodom in bodily presence, not in heart. Her judgment is recalled to mind by the Saviour. Which of the two does Christendom resemble? His people are not in a state which God can own, if they do not say such things as Abraham, if they say them not in deed and in truth.

God communicates His thoughts to Abraham, and Abraham responds, in his measure, to such grace on God’s part. He is not here, as in Genesis 15, asking something for himself; he intercedes for others. There is no lovelier scene than the opening one of Genesis 18, upon which the infidel spues his wretched materialism, and proves his moral incapacity to appreciate God’s gracious condescension to his “friend.” “This did not Abraham.” Accustomed to the ways and words of God, he quickly feels the divine presence; yet he beautifully waits till the Lord is pleased to discover Himself, acting all the while with a touching and instinctive deference.

Indeed, such intimacy was not only most suitable to the infancy of man in the revealed blessings of God, but it was the fitting prelude and preparation for Abraham to learn the high privileges in store for him; above all, for that precious communion, which rejoices in another’s blessings, and sympathises in another’s sorrows. God

therein assured Abraham, in such a way that he could not possibly mistake, of His interest, and His confidence in him. “And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him,” Gen. 18:17-19. Abraham enjoys the closest intercourse with Jehovah, who reveals His counsels to him. Not only is he told afresh, with fuller light, of the promised seed, but he learns from God the imminent destruction of Sodom.

Now God has displayed other, richer, and more spiritual means of assuring our hearts of His love; but nothing could be more appropriate then than His dealings with Abraham. He appears to him in the plains of Mamre. He comes before the tent door, enters, converses, and walks with Him. He wanted to confirm the heart of Abraham practically; and He succeeded, we need scarcely add. The effect appears in pleading before Jehovah. For us, through infinite grace, He has provided something better still. He has come and manifested Himself in Jesus. And we have the certainty that we have, in the Man Christ Jesus, One who ever intercedes for us; yea, we see ourselves in Christ before God; and the Holy Ghost gives us an intimacy with God, which even Abraham did not and could not enjoy, because the basis which renders it possible was not yet laid. It is too likely that we have made little progress in using this nearness to God; but such is our standing privilege; though it be not a palpable visible thing, the reality of this intimacy is

not the less great. The counsels of God are revealed to us in His word, and the Holy Spirit is given to us that we may know and enjoy them. What we fail in is the simple and strong faith of Abraham.

Abraham does not dread the presence of Jehovah; such fear is the effect of sin. If we have seen the glory of God in Jesus, the divine presence becomes sweet to us; we find there full strength and confidence. To know Him is indeed life eternal, and His presence makes us happy with the deepest possible joy.

When a soul is in this confidence, God shares His thoughts, as here He treats Abraham as a friend, telling him even what concerns the world. With a friend we do not speak of mere business, but of what we have on our heart. Intercession is the fruit of the divine revelation and fellowship. Abraham, separate from the world, and with the Lord upon the mountain, communes of the judgment which was about to fall upon the world below. The church is, in a still more positive and complete way, separated to God from the world, and beloved of Him. God confides to the church His thoughts—not merely what He means to do for her, but what is hanging over the world. The Son of man is going to judge the quick as well as the dead; and He has told us of it.

God shews the world the utmost patience. He lingers; He “is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” If His love be displayed to us in ways beyond and more spiritual than that which the elders tasted, His forbearance to the guilty world is also more marked. If a man had to govern the world, he could not

endure its ingratitude and iniquity for an hour. God brings His friend, in some degree, to enter into His own long-suffering, and even reproduces it, as it were, in him. The angels, in the guise of men, turn their faces and go toward Sodom; but Abram stood yet before Jehovah. Such also is the portion of the church—to stand before the Lord and learn His purposes and thoughts. She is familiar with His love for her, and has the consciousness of it. She intercedes for the world, in the hope that there is still room for grace. The heart then leaves circumstances to draw upon the love that is in God. If we cannot intercede for a person, the sin is stronger than our faith. When we are practically near God, the Spirit which sees the sin intercedes for the sinner.

Abraham is silent (v. 33), “and the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham”; but He did more than Abraham asked. He withdrew Lot from Sodom and saved him. Nothing could be done till Lot was safe; Gen. 19:16, 22. God’s eye was upon him. What blessedness to be able to reckon on His love for the righteous!

Abraham persevered in intercession, though he stopped short of the fulness of God’s mercy. We know not as God knows all He is going to do. Nevertheless we may intercede with faith. Abraham grows bold as he goes on; his confidence increases. In result he knows God much better than before. The peace of God kept his heart. The fruit of it all is seen in Genesis 19:27, 28, where Abraham gets up early in the morning, to the place where he stood before the Lord, and looks down on the plain, now smoking like a furnace. From far above he sees the effects of the utter destruction. Such is our

position if we are heavenly. It is thus that we see the judgment of the wicked.

On the other side, Lot and his daughters had been spared —saved so as by fire—not to their honour, but through the faithful care and tender mercy of the Lord. It was his unfaithfulness, indeed, that had placed Lot there; it was his unmortified desire after the good things of the world. “And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord… Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan” (Gen. 13); then he pitched his tent toward Sodom. Next he dwelt in Sodom; Gen. 14. On the eve of its downfall, “Lot sat in the gate of Sodom,” in the place of honour there (Gen. 19:1), sad example of the earthly minded believer in the path of declension! Such men dishonour the Lord, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

Jesus, The Author And Finisher Of Faith

Hebrews 12:2

All the witnesses for God spoken of in Hebrews 11 are for our encouragement in the path of faith; but then there is a difference between them and Jesus. Accordingly the apostle here singles Him out of all. If I see Abraham, who by faith sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, or Isaac, who blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come, or Jacob on his dying bed of blessing and worship, they have all run their race before; but in Jesus we have a far higher witness. Besides, in Him there is the grace to sustain us in the race.

Therefore in looking unto Jesus we get a motive and an unfailing source of strength. We see in Jesus the love which led Him to take this place for us, who, “when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them.” For, if a race is to be run, we need a forerunner. And in Jesus we have got one who did run before us, and has become the Captain and Completer of faith, in looking to whom we draw strength into our souls. While Abraham and the rest filled up, in their little measure, their several places, Christ has filled up the whole course of faith. There is no position that I can be in, no trial whatever that I can endure, but Christ has passed through all and overcome. Thus I have got One who presents Himself in that character which I need; and I find in Him one who knows what grace is wanted, and will supply it; for He has overcome, and says to me, “Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world”—not, you shall overcome; but, I

have overcome. It was so in the case of the blind man (John 9:31, etc.) who was cast out of the synagogue; and why? Because Jesus had been cast out before him. And now we learn, that however rough the storm may be, it does but throw us the more thoroughly on Christ, and thus that which would have been a sore trial does but drive us closer to Him.

Whatever turns our eye away from Christ is but a hindrance to our running the race that is set before us. If Christ has become the object of the soul, let us lay aside every weight. If I am running a race, a cloak, however comfortable, would only hinder and must be got rid of; it is a weight; and would prevent my running. I do not want anything to entangle my feet. If I am looking to Jesus in the appointed race, I must throw the cloak aside: otherwise it would seem strange to throw away so useful a garment. Nay, more; however much encouragement the history of antecedent faithful witnesses in Hebrews 11 may give, our eye must be fixed on Jesus, the true and faithful One. There is not a trial or difficulty that He has not passed through before me, and found His resources in God the Father. He will supply the needed grace to my heart.

There were these two features in the life of Christ down here. First, He exercised constant dependence on His Father: as He said, “I live by the Father.” The new man is ever a dependent man. The moment we get out of dependence, we get into the flesh. It is not through our own life (for, indeed, we have but death) that we really five, but by Christ, through feeding on Him. In the highest possible sense, He walked in dependence on the Father, and for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Secondly, His affections

were undivided. You never find Christ having any new object revealed to Him so as to induce Him to go on in His path of faithfulness. Paul and Stephen, on the other hand, had the glory revealed to them, which enabled them to endure. For when the heaven was opened to Stephen, the Lord appeared in glory to him, as afterwards to Saul of Tarsus. But when the heavens opened on Jesus, there was no object presented to Him, but, on the contrary, He was the object of heaven; the Holy Ghost descends upon Him, and the voice of the Father declares, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Thus the divine Person of the Lord is always being witnessed to. The aposde here gets hold of the preciousness of Christ in the lowliness into which He has come; but he never loses sight of the glory of Him who has come there. So when I get Christ at the baptism of John, I see Him at the lowest point (save in another way on the cross); and, finding Him there, I find all the divine compassion of His heart.

Our Joy In Heaven

Luke 9:28-36

Let us look a little at this scripture, as shewing what our joy in the glory will consist of. We have the warrant of 2 Peter 1:16 for saying that the scene represents to us the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is what we wait for. Our souls are not in a healthy state unless we are waiting for God's Son from heaven. The church is not regulated in its hopes by the word and Spirit of God, unless it is looking for Him as Saviour from heaven; Phil. 3. And this passage, as disclosing to us specially what will be our portion when He comes, is important to us in this respect. There are many other things in the passage, such as the mutual relations of the earthly and the heavenly people in the kingdom. These it may be very instructive to consider; but this is not our present purpose, which is to consider what light is here afforded on the nature of that joy which we shall inherit at and from the coming of the Lord. Other scriptures, such as the promises to those who overcome in Revelation 2 and 3, and the description of the heavenly city in Revelation 21 and 22, give us instructions on the same subject; but let us now particularly look at the scene on the holy mount.

"And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and James and John, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering." It was when Jesus was in the acknowledgment of dependence— "as he prayed" —that, this change took place. This, then, is the first thing we

have here—a change such as will pass upon the living saints when Jesus comes.

“And behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias.” They were with Him. And this will be our joy; we shall be with Jesus. In 1 Thessalonians 4 after stating the order in which the resurrection of the sleeping, and the change of the living, saints will take place, that we shall both be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, all that the apostle says as to what shall ensue is, “and so shall we be ever with the Lord.”

But in this passage there is not only the being with Christ, but there is also familiar intercourse with Him. “There talked with him two men.” It is not that He talked with them, though this was no doubt true; but this might have been, and they be at a distance. But when we read that they talked with Him, we get the idea of the most free and familiar intercourse. Peter and the others knew what it was to have such intercourse with Jesus in humiliation; and what joy must it have been to have the proof that such intercourse with Him would be enjoyed in glory!

And then it is said by Luke that “they appeared in glory.” But this is secondary to what we have been considering. We are told that they were with Him, and then that they appeared in glory. They share in the same glory as that in which He was manifested. And so as to us. “When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.” “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that

thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me."

But there is another thing still. We are not only told that they were with Him, that they talked with Him, and appeared in glory with Him, but we are also privileged to know the subject of their conversation. They "spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." It was the cross which was the theme of their conversation in the glory—the sufferings of Christ which He had to accomplish at Jerusalem. And surely this will be our joy throughout eternity, when in glory with Christ —to dwell upon this theme, His decease accomplished at Jerusalem. We next read that Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep. It shews us what the flesh is in the presence of the glory of God. Peter made a great mistake; but I pass on.

"While he thus spake, there came a cloud and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son; hear him." Peter tells us that this voice came from the excellent glory. "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Now Peter and the others had entered into the cloud; and thus we get the wonderful fact that in the glory, from which the voice comes, saints are privileged to stand, and there, in that glory, share the delight of the Father in His beloved Son. Not only are we called to the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ, we are called to have fellowship with the Father. We are admitted of God the Father to partake of His satisfaction in His beloved Son.

“And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone.” The vision all gone—the cloud, the voice, the glory, Moses and Elias; but Jesus was left, and they were left to go on their way with Jesus, knowing Him now in the light of those scenes of glory which they had beheld. And this is the use to us of those vivid apprehensions of spiritual things which we may sometimes realise. It is not that we can be always enjoying them and nothing else. But when for the season they have passed away, like this vision on the holy mount, they leave us alone with Jesus, to pursue the path of our pilgrimage with Him in spirit now, and with Him in the light and power of that deepened acquaintance with Him, and fellowship of the Father’s joy in Him, that we have got on the mount; and thus to wait for the moment of His return, when all this, and more than our hearts can think of, shall be fulfilled to us for ever.

Grace Rejected, And Heavenly Glory Opened

Acts 7

Such are two of the main thoughts presented in this striking and instructive chapter. God was rejected, let Him speak or act as He might, and never more than when He displayed His grace. “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.” It is true, these Christ-rejecting Jews boasted in the law; but if they had received the law by the disposition of angels, had they kept it? They had persecuted the prophets; they had slain those who foreshadowed the coming of the Just One; they had now betrayed and murdered Himself.

It was no new feature in their history. Their fathers had done the same as themselves. Man is ever resisting what God sends in blessing. Joseph and Moses had been rejected, the two prominent types of the Lord Jesus. Their fathers despised and hated Joseph; they had done the same by Christ. God exalted Joseph; and Stephen’s testimony was to Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And if Joseph sent and called his kindred in grace, did not and will not Christ do the same?

Moses appears. He abandons the house of Pharaoh in love to his brethren; but they resisted him, as Christ was resisted. “As your fathers did, so do ye.” All boasting then was ended. They were constant only in opposing the Holy Ghost. This is ever the case with the natural man. He cannot trust God. He ever resists the Spirit of God. There is no power in him to rely on the word of God; but the moment a thing is built up which can be

seen, man can trust in that, no matter what it may be. God may be gone; but if it be the tabernacle or the temple, some settled thing for the eye, man will trust in it, though it is the very thing God is about to judge.

The testimony God gave was resisted; and man was clinging to that which God is going to pull down. All that is not founded upon the word will be shaken, and this, terrible though it be to flesh and blood, is a positive promise to us. “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, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire,” Heb. 12. How far can you take this as a promise? If your hearts are resting here, you cannot. This may be easily known by the test—how far are your hearts attached to Christ in heaven, unseen save to the eye of faith?

How beautifully was this brought out in the case of Stephen! He was a bright reflection of his blessed Master, resisting unto blood in his strife against sin. What is more, he brings before us a vivid picture to be followed in our everyday life. For we are called always to testify for Christ, through the power of the Spirit, though it may not be unto death.

Besides, the rejection of the testimony by Stephen was a turning-point of the ways of God with Israel, with man, though the principle had already come out at the death

of Christ. God never could directly bless the world after that. He could forgive guilty Israel if they repented, and send Christ back again, in answer to the prayer on the cross. And this is just what Peter preaches in Acts 3 that, if the people were converted, to the blotting out of their sins, Jesus was ready to return, and to bring in the times of restitution of all things—a truth which their present impenitence postpones, but does not destroy: for He is coming again. But now Stephen's testimony is utterly refused, and the witness of Christ's heavenly glory is cast out of the city and stoned without mercy. It was the fitting sequel of such a testimony.

God had been dealing with man in all sorts of ways since Adam, but it only brought out the greater evil, for man continually resisted Him. Before the law they were lawless; they were transgressors when they had the law. God had given priests, kings, prophets in vain. Then He sent His Son. But they only rejected God in all ways, and at all times. When Christ came, sin added another crime to the terrible list. The deepest of all evils was there—rejection of the Son of man in His humiliation, and of the Spirit's testimony to His exaltation in heavenly glory. Jesus came not in the sternness of the law, but in love, yet He met only with enmity and hatred. If men, as such, could have been connected with God, they must have been when Christ came. But man needs a new nature for such a link; and this Christ does give to all who believe, and has sent down the Holy Ghost to maintain it in power.

So Stephen, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said,

Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Such is the true place of the believer, rendered capable by the Spirit of fixing his eye on Jesus in glory, and this in presence of the world and its prince, who crucified the Lord of glory. It is not simply nor vaguely his eye opened to glory, but he sees the Son of man there, and the Spirit forms his heart, and mind, and walk according to that pattern. For the veil is rent, and Jesus is seen in heaven.

We have heaven opened four times in the New Testament; and of these the first when the Lord was upon the earth. There was nothing in the actual condition of man which God could look on with pleasure till the Man Christ Jesus was seen on earth. That the heavens should open on Him was no marvel. God had found perfect rest upon earth, and said, when the heavens opened, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." On the last occasion, namely, in Revelation 19, heaven is opened for the fourth time, and Christ is seen as coming to judge. In each of these heaven opened to Christ. But there was a third scene when heaven opened, and not to Christ. He had been rejected from earth, and was no longer a link between it and God. Where then is He? At God's right hand. When He was crucified, the whole world was condemned, and the prince of this world judged. All had joined together—governor, priest, people—against the Lord and His anointed. The world deliberately rejected the holiness of God, and had no heart for the love of God. Yet after this, and in spite of this, we get heaven opened once more before Christ comes to execute judgment. Heaven is opened upon a believer in Christ, upon a witness to His

glory outside the world. “Behold, I see the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” Christ Himself was the object on earth upon whom heaven opened. Christ is now the object in heaven presented to the believer on earth.

Stephen’s testimony only drew out the murderous opposition of the world. It had been guilty of rejecting Christ down here. It equally rejected Him, now that He is proclaimed as the exalted One in heaven. But Stephen only thus saw and testified, when “full of the Holy Ghost.” To have the Holy Ghost is one thing; to be filled with the Holy Ghost is another. When He is the one source of my thought, I am filled with Him. When He has possession of my heart, there is power to silence what is not of God, to keep my soul from evil, and to guide in every act of my life and walk; so that in both I am kept apart from the world. Compare Ephesians 5:18: “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”

Are we then looking steadfastly into heaven? Alas! what inconstant hearts we have: how fickle and changing! The Holy Ghost ever leads the eye to, and would keep it fixed on, Jesus. He is the object of the Spirit from all eternity; whether as the Son in the bosom of the Father; or as the rejected Messiah on earth; or as the Son of man exalted at the right hand of God. To reveal and glorify Him is the habitual aim of the Spirit. When we have not much power for prayer, or even to follow others, and our hearts get full of distracted thoughts—when there is little energy in our souls for praise and worship, we have but a feeble measure of the power of the Spirit; we are not filled with the Holy Ghost.

The heavens, then, can be opened upon a believer here below, when Christ, the Son of man, is up there. What a thought, what a truth for our heart! Indeed, more than this; for in Ephesians 2 we learn the blessed fact, that God has quickened us together with Christ, has raised us up together, and seated us together in Christ in heavenly places. He has taken His place at the right hand of God: and we are made to sit there in Him, because united to Him who is there. “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”

It is no longer, then, the heavens opening and Jesus acknowledged in humiliation to be the beloved Son of God. It is not the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man, the object of service to those who were the most dignified and holy creatures of God. It is not yet heaven opened and a rider upon a white horse, issuing thence in triumphant judgment. It is a precious and interesting scene, where the disciple on earth sees the heavens opened, and, filled with the Spirit, sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at His right hand. It is the manifest and characteristic picture of the true position of the Christian, rejected like Jesus, because of Jesus, with Jesus, but withal his eyes opened by the Holy Ghost to higher hopes and glory than any dependent on the Lord’s return to and judgment of the earth, and restoration of His ancient people. Heavenly glory is the portion with which his soul is in present fellowship and with Jesus therein.

Indeed Stephen’s discourse to the Jews had strikingly paved the way to this; for while he had sketched the history of the people from the very first, he had singled out Abraham, called away from his country and kindred

by the appearing of God in glory. Abraham, a stranger in the land of promise, and not a foot of it as yet his own. He had traced the sins, sorrows, and bondage of “our fathers,” till God delivered the people out of Egypt, as He had previously called Abraham from Mesopotamia. Two individuals stood out most significantly; but they were scarcely more characterised by the honour of God, than they had been previously by the rejection of Israel. Joseph given up to the Gentiles, afterwards the most exalted in the personal administration of the kingdom, and the instrument of the goodness and wisdom of God, in behalf of the very brethren who had persecuted and sold him; Moses, the refused ruler and judge, whom God sent, long after, to be a ruler and a deliverer; just such had been the features of their recent sin, and such should be the path of God in His grace. But they had no ear for Him as yet. From the very first, their idolatrous hearts had departed from Him, however slow He had been in executing judgment. And however their pride might rest complacently in this holy place, God Himself in truth was, and had been, as great a stranger, so to speak, in Canaan, as had been Abraham His friend. It was true that “Solomon built him an house.” But this had furnished the occasion for the prophet to tell them in due time, that the Most High, whose hand had made all things, would not rest in a temple made with hands; and this, in connection with restored idolatry in the temple, and the consummated wickedness and judgment of Israel in the latter day, before the Lord shall create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy.

And now, the history of Christ had been the fresh and full verification of these varied principles of God, and all was caused to flash on their unrenewed and rebellious

consciences by the Holy Ghost through Stephen. But heaven opened to him, as it can to us in virtue of our being members of Christ; as we see in John 14, “ye in me and I in you.” We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We are made the righteousness of God in Him. He has vindicated the holiness of God, whose righteousness is now for me and justifies me. And the Holy Ghost gives me competency to look up into heaven, and see my Forerunner there—my righteousness there. I am there, for Christ and the believer are united. I am one with Him. It is Paul who shews us this truth fully. It was made known to him from his very conversion, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” The other apostles never developed it as he did. Paul was the fitted vessel for disclosing this great truth, not yet unfolded—the secret hid in God— and thus for completing the word, as we read in Colossians 1. There had been, as it were, a blank left for it.

Stephen looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the Son of man standing at God’s right hand—a Man in heaven seen by one on earth! What an immense step! truly blessed to have Christ in heaven, to see Him there, and be livingly associated with Him in that glory.

But the Son of man was seen standing there. Why standing? He could not sit until the last act of rejection was completed. What a tale! What sin man has wrought: what woe he has entailed on himself! But Christ is set down waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. So must we wait. The righteousness we are made—we are not waiting for that, but for the hope of righteousness by faith. We are set down in Christ, in spirit and purpose, at God’s right hand, until the heavens open for the last time, and the Son of man comes to judge all that can be

shaken. Does this alarm me? No. I am safe to the end. I have the city which hath foundations. I am linked in with what God has settled, and cannot be moved.

What an effect this sight in heaven should have upon our souls! In Stephen it produced a thorough practical likeness to Christ. If you look at Christ, He witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, the people, etc. What is Stephen? A faithful follower of the One he sees in heaven. He bears witness to his Master, forgetful of himself, or his danger, without a thought of consequences. The Holy Ghost guides and fills him with holy joy that ran over. His heart was filled with Christ to the exclusion of care for his life, or what should follow. Christ was the only object before him. He was like Christ in confession, like Him in suffering too, "filling up that which was behind." What a picture of practical conformity to Christ in grace—perfect confidence in looking up to the Lord, into whose hands he committed his spirit— strong intercession, as he thought of those who stoned him to death. "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

The ungrieved Spirit displayed in Stephen the reflection of the character and ways and words of Christ; but this brought on trial, and it ever will be so. The cross we shall have: and what of that? It is a good thing for us; it draws us away from the world; it breaks the will; it delivers from self, by cutting, it may be, the next link to the heart. The cross has a delicious power, though not a pleasant thing; it would be no cross if it were. But it lifts up the believer, and makes him see what a portion he has in Christ, who waits to take those He has redeemed to Himself, "that where I am, there ye may be also."

Glorying In The Cross

Galatians 6:14

Nothing is so difficult as to take a man out of himself; it is impossible, except by giving him a new nature. Man glories in anything that will bring honour to himself—anything that distinguishes him from his neighbour. It does not signify what it is (it may be that he is the tallest man); anything his pride may come into in that which gives him advantage over others. Some may glory in their talents. There are differences in men's minds; vanity is seen more in some, wishing for the good opinion of others; pride more in others, having a good opinion of themselves. Wealth, knowledge, anything that distinguishes a man, he will glory in, and make a little world around himself by it.

There is another thing, too, that men glory in, besides talent, birth, wealth, etc., and that is his religion. Take a Jew, and you will find he glories in not being a Turk; the Christian, so called, glories in that he is not a heathen and a publican. Man will thus take the very thing that God has given to take him out of himself to accredit himself with. Those who are so deluded as to be throwing themselves down to Juggernaut may have less to glory in, or to fancy they can glory in; but the measure of truth, connected with the religion men hold, is the very occasion of their glorying. Thus the Turk, who owns God, will glory in his religion over those who do not; the Jew, in his religion—he has the truth, and "salvation is of the Jews"; the Gentile Christian, too, has truth, but then he prides himself upon it, and this brings in the mischief. The subtlety of the enemy is seen in

proportion as it is truth in which he makes a man glory; and it is not so difficult to detect, either, for if you are proud of being a Christian, the whole thing is told at once.

It is quite another thing, of course, for the true, genuine child of God walking in the power of the cross, etc., who glories in that he knows God. With Jonah there was just this pride at work: he was proud of being a Jew, and would not go to Nineveh, as God told him, because he was afraid of losing his reputation. He had rather have seen all Nineveh destroyed, than have his own credit as a prophet lost. Jonah was a true prophet, but, glorying in himself, he turned his religion into a ground of self-glorying. Whatever you are decking yourself out with—it may even be with a knowledge of Scripture—it is glorying in the flesh. Ever so little a thing is enough to make us pleased with ourselves; what we should not notice in another is quite enough to raise our own importance.

Glorying in religion is a deeper thing. Whatever comes from man must be worthless. A man cannot glory in being a sinner. Conscience can never glory, and there is no true religion without the conscience—not speaking now of righteousness in Christ. What is it then in religion that man glories in? It always must have a legal character, because there must be something for him to do—hard penance, or anything, no matter at what cost, if it only glorifies self. “As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh constrain you to be circumcised… they desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.” Man could bind heavy burdens. Why should he? Because self would have to do something. When man glories in self there may be the truth in a measure,

but it is of the legal character always, because there must be something man can do for God. Glorying in the flesh is not glorying in sin, but, as in Philippians 3, religious glorying, glorying in something besides Christ.

But in the cross man has nothing to say to it. It is not my cross, but "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," and the only part I had in Christ's cross was sin. My sin had to do with it, for it brought Him there. This puts man down altogether. That which saves man, and what God delights in, man could not put a finger to in bearing. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men." The one single thing I have in the cross is my sin. There is this further thought: we are utterly lost without it. Divine love treats me as an utterly lost sinner, and the more I see that perfect divine love, the more I see how vile I am, utterly contemptible, defiled and lost. I have liked defiling myself; I am a wretched slave, dragged down to my defilement. The cross, when I see what it is, destroys my glorying in self, and puts truth in the inward parts, too, for it not only shews me how bad I am, but it makes me glad to confess my sin, instead of making excuses for it. I am awakened to say, I am guilty of having loved all this. Love opens the heart, and enables me to come and tell Him how bad I am. I thus delight to record all that He has done, all that I owe Him; and that is thankfulness. My heart tells out its vile-ness; there is no guile—not delighting in the sin, of course, but rejoicing in the remedy.

Then we have, on the other side, farther, God's delight in the cross. "Having made peace through the blood of the cross," God gives us to delight with Him in the value of it. And first we see in it God's unutterable love—not love called out, like ours, by a lovable object. No; "God

commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It was love acting in its own proper energy— from itself only—so properly divine that a soul expecting it, as a matter of course, could not be a fit object for it. God's work and God's way are shewn in a manner that man could not and ought not to have thought of. I am a poor miserable sinner, and there I see God's love in giving His own Son. When He forgives, there is the positive active energy of love in giving the best thing—the thing nearest to itself—for sin, which is the thing farthest from itself, giving it to be "made sin." When I look at the cross, I see perfect and infinite love, God giving His Son to be "made sin"; I see perfect and infinite wisdom also.

With a conscience, I cannot enjoy God's love without seeing Him dealing about my sins. Even a sparrow God can be good to, it is true; but can God accept me in my sins? Can He accept an imperfect offering? As Micah says, Can I give "the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Cain brought the fruit of his own work, without any sense of sin: the hardness of his heart was proved by it, and an utter forgetful-ness about his sin. I see in the cross what my sin is. I cannot look at that as God sees it without learning God. Man has forgotten God enough to rise up against Him who was God's remedy for his misery. Then judgment must be exercised: God's authority must be vindicated. "It became him … to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Are angels to see man flying in God's face, and He take no notice of it? No! Therefore, "it became him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things," etc. God is a righteous judge, and judgment must be executed. There is judgment as well as love

seen in the cross; not only Christ, the Holy One, being made sin, but undergoing the judgment due to sin. There is the unsparing wrath of God against the sin, but God's perfect love to the sinner. There His majesty, which we insulted, is vindicated: even the Son bows to that. If He is to keep up the brightness of the Father's glory, He must vindicate His character in this way. God's truth was proved at the cross. "The wages of sin is death." Man had forgotten this; but Christ stands up, the witness of God in such a world, that what God has said is true. "The wages of sin is death." The love with which God wins man to Him proves this very thing at the same time.

There is more in the cross. God accomplishes all His purposes by it. He is bringing "many sons to glory," and how could He bring these defiled sinners into the same glory with His own Son? Why, God has so fully accomplished the work that, when in the glory with Him, we shall be a part of the display of that glory. Therefore He says, "That in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace"—a Mary Magdalene, a thief upon the cross, trophies of that grace, through all eternity! And how could He set them in such a place with His own Son? His own glory and love rise over all our sin and put it all away: He Himself has done it.

For us, then, the cross has done two things: it has given peace of conscience—and not what man can see outside, and then spoil. No, He has "perfected for ever them that are sanctified." All sin is blotted out and put away. I can glory in the cross, then, for my sins are gone!

Again, "After that ye have known God, or rather are known of God"—poor wretched things that we are, to be

made the vessels of such love and grace. The conscience has certainty and peace, and more than that, a confidence that Adam in innocence could never have had. There is communion and peace in my own soul, and there is another thing also—I have clearness of understanding in the ways of God. Should I go through a course of ceremonies, genuflexions, etc., to add to my perfectness which I have through the cross? You do not know the cross; you do not know what Christ— what God—has done by the cross, if you are trying other things to make you better. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin?” When you know not the cross, you may use all these efforts to satisfy and quiet your conscience. When you know it, it leaves spiritual affections free. When I see the cross, I can love God. If I have offended Him, I can go off to Him directly and tell Him; for I am a child, and my relationship is not thereby altered. My fellowship is with the Father and the Son—this is my happy privilege.

When I can glory in the cross, there is an end of glorying in self; for I am nothing but a sinner. He has brought us to God by the cross, for Christ has suffered, the just for the unjust. Are our souls glorying in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, or in vanity, or in self? If you are not glorying in the cross, it is your own loss, not to say your own sin; for you can never see God’s love, God’s holiness, God’s wisdom, God’s truth, as on the cross. Even where you are you may learn it, for you have not to climb up somewhere to get it; but it has come to you where you are. It is not, when you are better you may come. You cannot come when you are better, though it will make you better. It is as a sinner you must come. The apostle came as “the chief of sinners.” Then “the

world," as he says, "is crucified to me, and I to the world." The very nature which is connected with the world is what occasioned Christ's death, therefore, when I glory in the cross, I am crucified to the world.

The Love Of God

1 John 4:9-18

If we look at man, we shall find his whole history in the history of Adam. What Adam was in the garden, man has been ever since, from the garden to the cross. God tried man, but man only marred all he was trusted with.

When God chose a nation it was no better. The people were idolaters, the kings rebellious, the priests soiled their garments, so that they could not stand before God. Whatever God has given in creation, providence, law, or grace, man has abandoned. When the Lord from heaven came, the iniquitous nation rejected Him. But He never fails, and God will prove His love and wisdom by meeting His own people in every single thing, in which man has broken down. All will come out in glory, as the positive fruit of the cross. We learn a great deal more of what God is by knowing man; and we learn a great deal more of what man is by knowing God. If we look at the church, man is just the same. The mystery of iniquity working, the spirit of demons amongst them, the love of many waxing cold, until there is not one righteous one left, but all closes in perfect ruin.

God gives a power apart from man. He gives a new life—a life in His Son. In virtue of Him, it cannot fail. It is eternal life—life in Christ. God was perfectly manifested in the Son, when He came down from heaven to give life. But this is not enough. What about my sins? Where are my sins? To have life without the question of sin being settled will not do. Christ had them on the cross. Christ came down from heaven to put my sin away, and He did put it away and can say, “at that day ye shall

know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." Christ's life is in me— "eternal life, and this life is in his Son." I have His life, not His Godhead, of course. As surely as I have partaken of the life and nature of the first Adam, so have I life in the second Adam. "If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation." The divine nature is there. It is in a poor earthen vessel, it is true; but the nature is divine, and I should be shewing it out in my life and character.

The more I know of God, the more shall I exhibit what He is. The more I look at Him, the more I shall be like Him. What made Moses' face to shine? Was it looking at himself? No. It was being with Jehovah and looking at His glory. Moses did not know that his face was shining until he was asked to veil it. He was not occupied with himself: the object before him was God. He had been looking at God, he was absorbed in God, and so shews out God's glory. It will be the same with us. If Christ is the object before me, I shall not be thinking of myself, but of Him. I shall be exhibiting Him, dwelling upon what He is, and not upon what I am doing. If my eye is upon Christ, I shall resemble Him (feebly indeed) in holiness, and humbleness, and love. I find it in Him in all its blessedness and beauty; I see it in all its perfect-ness, and in looking at Him, I am changed into His image. In Him there is all the new nature can crave or desire. In Him I can rest, and delight, and rejoice.

What never-ending joy to know the Son of God is come! Satan works, it is true, but "ye are of God." This settles the whole thing. No longer of the old nature, living and acting according to the life of the first Adam; but in the power of the new nature, that we derive from God. What a thing to be partakers of the divine nature, made higher

than angels. This is a most blessed truth, “Ye are of God,” of Him, whose nature is divine. And this divine nature cannot be in us, but by Himself. Christ has washed us from our sins in. His own most precious blood. He has baptised us from above with the Holy Ghost and sealed us with the Spirit of promise. “He who hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given us the earnest of the Spirit.” He has given us a power which is above Satan’s power. “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” “Ye are of God.” I am brought to God. I am born of God. I rest in God. I learn to know God, because I have got the nature that can know Him, just as I could only know what man is by having his nature.

I do not know all about God, that is true; but I have no uncertainty. Suppose I have a friend, I may not know all about him; but he is my friend, and I rejoice in him as such, I have no questionings as to his affections, because I do not know all about him. Well, God is my friend, and I have a blessed rest in knowing Him as my friend. If God is my friend, what more can I need? What can be more blessed? To know God, I must have His nature. I cannot know the nature of what I am not a partaker of. I do not know angels. I am not a partaker of the nature of angels.

We see two things in this chapter which give the soul immense delight. Verse 9 shews us the way God makes His love known. In verse 17 we see how His love is made perfect. In verse 9 God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we may have life through Him. That we may have life who were dead, that we may be partakers of a life that flows from the manifestation of God’s love—a life separated altogether from nature and nature’s

affections and pleasures. It cannot be linked up with selfishness. And what is my nature: is it not mere selfishness? If I look at my motives from day to day, what shall I find them? Are they not self? Take business (we are not speaking of the Tightness of the thing), what is the motive? Is it not self? We have no idea how we are under the influence of self. Is it not true that the trifles of dress more occupy the thoughts of many than all God has done in sending down His Son from heaven to save sinners? It is a positive fact, and it is no use to try to hide it from ourselves. We cannot hide it from God.

On the other hand, the more I look at this love, the more I see of its perfectness. It is said “for a good man some will even dare to die.” But when there was not one single good thing in us, God commended His love to us. It was purely grace shewn to us in the cross. We were just sinners and nothing but sinners when Christ died to save us. And I can never understand what God’s love really is, until I can say I am merely a sinner. If you do not know what God’s love is, it is because you have not learnt that great truth, that you are but a sinner. What is it that God has given to save sinners? The very nearest thing to His heart, the most precious boon He had to bestow, His own beloved and only-begotten Son. There is no accounting for His love; there is no estimating it. The thing most of all dear to Him was the Son of His bosom, and Him He gave. There is no limit to His love. He has given me Christ, and there is no end to what I have in Him. The Son of God given for my sins, He goes down into these depths and brings up life. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.” How can I know that God loves me? By looking at the perfect object of His

love, and this gives me rest. Why? Because in Him I see how wondrous is the love that sent down His Son to give me eternal life, and be a propitiation for my sins. If I have not rest, what I want is a deeper sense of sin. I must learn what sin is at the cross; and then I shall see the love that has met it and suffered for it, and thus my soul gets rest.

Christ's love was not the theory of one who comes and merely tells what God is, but the practical exhibition of Him. He shews out God in all the variety of His unreserved and immeasurable love. Compare verse 12 with verse 18 of John 1, "No man hath seen God at any time"—He "who is [not was] in the bosom of the Father" must declare Him. The Son must tell what can be known of the Father. On Christ hangs everything. All hindrances are gone for the believer through Him; all sin is put away by Him. I here get a place of intimate nearness to God in Him. I have learnt at the cross what God was to me as a sinner; and now I have to learn how He meets my wants as a saint, by feeling my need and bringing it to Him. To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in His heart towards me. When the prodigal was hungry, he went to feed upon husks; but when he was starving, he turned to his father's house, and then learnt the love of the father's heart.

In verse 15, how low God comes! "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." How He steps down to meet us, so that every one shall be left without excuse. "Whosoever shall confess." The babe who can but just confess Christ has eternal life, as truly as the strong man in Christ. It is not a question of what I am, but of what Christ is. I am

lost sight of. All hangs on what God is. How can I know His love? Must I wait for its full display? No, He has shed abroad His love in my heart, by the Spirit He has given me. Verse 16, “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” If I am dwelling in God, I am dwelling in love, and should be shewing out love by looking at Him and not at others. Verse 17, this is a wonderful thing to say, “as he is, so are we in this world.” He has taken His seat at God’s right hand, and brings me there.

We are now before God in the righteousness of Christ. He is my life, and I cannot be really, nor ought to appear in anything separated from Him. “Herein is love perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” Does the heart get exercised about judgment? Does the thought of standing before it distress you? Why should it be so? Is not He, my righteousness, the judge? Has He not perfectly put away my sin and purged my conscience from all guilt, so that I can rest in God without fear; having no longer any painful uncertainty, but calmly looking forward in the full assurance that Christ has been judged in my stead, and brought me into blessed fellowship with that love, which gives me boldness in the day of judgment? “As he is, so are we in this world.”

“There is no fear in love.” If there is the smallest doubt or distrust in the heart towards God, you are not made perfect in love; for “perfect love casteth out fear.” There are things to fear, it is true; we may well fear sin, and the influence of our own selfish interests. But the practical effect of resting on God is to cast out all fear, and make the heart perfect in love. His love is perfect. We have but to own it, bow to it, accept it as ours in

Christ, and bless Him for it. This is to be made perfect in love.

Christian Experience

Philippians 4

It is a very difficult thing to say, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark,” etc. (Phil. 3). The apostle had such a sight of what was at the end, he was so set a-going by it, that he was able to press forward towards the mark.

This epistle is not marked by great doctrines, but by speaking of the Christian course. Such a character of the epistle explains why the apostle speaks of “working out your own salvation with fear and trembling”; not because God has done everything for you, but “for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Just as when Israel was redeemed, they could speak of salvation as the end of their race, and not as the acceptance of their persons.

The enemy seemed to have got a great advantage by putting Paul into prison, but it was not at all so. “I know that this shall turn to my salvation.” It was not at all a vain thing, his speaking of his desire to depart and to be with Christ. “Yet what I shall choose, I wot not.” He had to choose between Christ and service here, and Christ and rest there.

He says nothing about circumstances, nothing about the Emperor Nero; he leaves them quite out of the account. But “I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.” What we learn from Scripture of the apostle’s circumstances when he wrote this epistle, greatly helps us to understand the

spirit in which he wrote. Many epistles give us more doctrine, as Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians; but none so gives us the likeness of the practical experience of the apostle in his Christian course.

Christ in resurrection was at the end of the vista before him, and the light of it was shining all down the path. The very thing he desired was to be a partaker of Christ's sufferings. He was looking for constant approximation to resurrection, for it was in resurrection he was to be conformed to Christ. He was taken hold of by grace for it, but now he desires himself to lay hold of it. He could count all things but loss and dung "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus"; and people do not like to be taking up filth. If we are gathering up what is here, we have not such a sight of the glory of the Lord as Paul had. At the first glow of conversion there is no difficulty in this; it is a very easy thing to count all things but loss then. Paul does not say, I have made all this sacrifice: see what I have done. He does not say, I did count them but dung, but "I do count them," etc. That which keeps his energy alive and fresh is, that he does not run uncertainly.

The first thing to understand is, not that we are in the course to resurrection, but that resurrection has put us in a certain place. This gives us energy in pressing forward to the mark, because we have one object before us. We find it so even in the natural man; he becomes clear-sighted when he has only one object instead of many. But in the things of God it is much more so, because there it is divine sight and divine energy.

"Rejoice in the Lord always." Certainly it could not be in circumstances, for he was a prisoner. Christians are

often a great deal happier in the trial, than they are in thinking of it; for there the stability, the certainty, the nearness, and the power of Christ are much more learnt, and they are happier. Paul could not so well have said, “Rejoice in the Lord always,” if he had not known what it was to be a prisoner. Just as in Psalm 34, “I will bless Jehovah at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Why? “This poor man cried, and Jehovah heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles.” “I sought Jehovah, and he heard me,” etc. This was what enabled him to say, “I will bless Jehovah at all times.” He had been in trouble, and had been heard when in trouble. It must have been an exceeding trial for one of Paul’s active disposition for service to be kept a prisoner; and this is the time when he can say to the persons who were in the commonplace circumstances which were dragging down their hearts day by day, “Rejoice in the Lord always!” Grace is sufficient for favourable circumstances, but they are by far the most trying (spiritually) to the believer. There is an easy way of going on in worldliness, and there is nothing more sad than the quiet comfortable Christian going on day by day, apart from dependence on the Lord. It must be as with Israel and the manna; there must be the daily gathering and daily dependence upon God. If circumstances come between our hearts and God, we are powerless. If Christ is nearer, circumstances will not hinder our joy in God. “The Lord is at hand!” Just as when you look at a light on a perfectly dark night; though it may be two miles off, it appears quite close. So, the more we prove the darkness of the world, whilst enjoying the love of Christ, the nearer the hope will appear.

“Be careful for nothing,” when he had everything to make him careful, when he knew what it was to be in prison and to hunger in the prison. Why can he say this? Because he had found Christ there. What has a man to be careful for, if Christ is caring for him?

“And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Not, You shall keep the peace of God, but “the peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds”—the peace in which God dwells; and what peace must that be? Can any circumstances shake God’s throne? God is not troubled about circumstances. Lay the whole burden upon Him, “and the peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds,” and you shall have it flowing into your hearts as a river, passing all understanding. The word is, “Be careful for nothing,” not even about the church, though God forbid that we should not care for it.

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.” First, cast all the troubles and cares upon God, and then our minds will be at leisure to turn and think upon whatsoever things are lovely, etc., alone—all these blessed things, which, notwithstanding Satan, grew as fruit. If the soul is occupied with the evil, there will be weakness, hut if occupying ourselves with the good, the soul will be strengthened.

Now we have the “God of peace.” You walk in the power in which you have seen me walk. ‘Those things which ye have seen and heard in me, do: and the God of peace

shall be with you,' not only the peace of God, but the God of peace. You will have God's power with you. Paul had walked in that path and had found the God of peace with him all the way through.

"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again." How glad the apostle is to see fruit! Besides rejoicing in the Lord always, he rejoices in the Lord about them: what made him happy was that he saw Christ blessing the saints. There is no such joy on earth (save communion) as seeing the saints walking in the truth.

Verses 11-13. We are apt to take the last of these verses as a general truth, and it is so; but he does not use it in this way here. What we have here is the practical, experimental acquaintance of Paul with this thing. He had been in peril, in want, and in plenty (a far more dangerous thing); he had found a present Christ sufficient for him in all circumstances. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." He cannot be our strength in circumstances which are contrary to His will. He would have our souls exercised, if not seeing the path straight before us, if we are walking in a path contrary to His will. There cannot be that happy liberty where the path of dependence upon God has been left. When Christians first leave the path of dependence on the Holy Ghost, they find difficulties and uneasiness; but gradually they are apt to get used to it, and then there is less conscience and less uneasiness. Where a person has left the path of spiritual power, everything takes the form of duties. The first working of the Spirit of God is to make him uneasy; then there is nothing to do but to go back the way he came. There are 'perplexities which arise from leaving the simple

straightforward path; then the Lord comes in and restores the soul for His name's sake. The Lord does give His people rest on their way; as He did to Israel when the ark went before them to find out a place where they might rest. Circumstances need never hinder the power of spiritual joy. If I am in prosperity or in adversity, nothing can separate me from His love. It is not said, through Christ which strengthened, but "which strengtheneth me": it is a present thing. Verses 14-18. Still lifting them up out of the mere temporal circumstances, and leading them into the consciousness of the connection of the saints with God— "a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."

"My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus," the God to whom I belong, and who, in a certain sense, belongs to me—the God whose faithfulness I know—who fed me when hungry, who strengthened me when weak. Exceeding sweet is it to see that what Paul had passed through, had brought him so near to God. He has found in all things, in prison, in want, etc., the infallible certainty of being associated with God.

Christ’s Place Ours

John 17

There are two great and evident consequences resulting from the place in which Christ has set us: one as looking towards the Father, the other as looking towards the world.

The first grand truth on which all is based is, that He places us in the same condition as and where He Himself is in. When the Lord Jesus was down here. He presented a double aspect, one towards the Father, and one towards the world: and just so is it with the saints now. What is true of Jesus is also true of those who believe in Him—His joy being fulfilled in them. He was a perfect witness for the Father, and the testimony of the saint in the world is for Him also.

The first part of the chapter shews the position of the saint before the Father, the end of it the saint’s position towards the world. A blessed and wonderful thing it is, that the saints are brought by grace into the same place and position as Himself. He by right and title had it, we by being made God’s righteousness in Him. It is testimony to the value of the redemption of Christ, and we cannot value it too highly. This exalts us not in a fleshly manner, but in the efficacy of what Christ wrought in resurrection. To His disciples He could say (John 20:17) “My Father and your Father.” If I think of the state of my conscience before God, I remember God as a judge. I love the Lord Jesus Christ when I believe something about the value of the blood; but if I love the things of Christ, I soon find much in me that is not like Christ; and if there is uprightness of heart, it is a great

deal easier to get at ease as to that which is past than it is for what is at present going on. What I find in myself now is that which troubles me; and the conscience must get peace about this, because the affections are renewed.

Even as regards the details of my conscience, as a saint, I have a holy conscience judging itself before God; so the more unhappy a quickened conscience will be, till it is set at rest; for God is holy, the soul is sinful, and the Father sees sin. What does God do when coming in judgment? He put the blood on the door of the Israelite, and that being under His eye, the destroying angel cannot come in. He only sees the blood and passes over; he beholds the witness of the sin put away by the death of the lamb. There is rest for the conscience by the blood. So sentence on evil has been brought in on God's part already. What meets His eye is the blood; a substitute has come in. God is satisfied in the execution of judgment. When there is uprightness of heart, there will never be peace till the conscience is clean before God; it can never rest till it has cleansing according to what God has wrought for it. God gave it, and God makes us know His satisfaction in His own holiness. The holy desires which God has wrought in us are not satisfied till all the demands of God are met.

Supposing the conscience to be at rest, what is God going to do with the people that He has redeemed? and what is the efficacy of this power? God has done it; He has not only put away the sin, but has brought us nigh unto Himself. The Son of.man, the second Adam, has brought us into the same position with Himself. Thus, when risen, He says, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father," etc. The

first Adam did this also, bringing us down to the same condition with himself. But we are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son; Rom. 8. What does this depend on? it is from the value of what His redemption wrought, and the power of His quickening life in resurrection. And the way in which it is to be known is by looking at the Lord Jesus Himself. Where has this redemption brought Him? It has placed Him, the risen Man, back in the presence of the glory where He was before as God. He humbled Himself (Phil. 2; Heb. 2); wherefore a name is given Him above every name. He is set at God's right hand. And here I can trace the result of that redemption which the Lord Jesus wrought, and which brought Him from the bosom of the Father, in placing Him there again.

Another point of value is the life-giving power. What is this life-giving power? "Because I live, ye shall live also." And (Col. 3:3, 4) we that have to combat with the evil in us, and to keep down the flesh, have the life of Christ in us; yet the soul daily needs the comfort of the blood. Where has God placed us? If we have not our part in the first Adam, we must have it in the second Adam—in Christ. There is no place with God for any one out of Christ. God cannot have persons out of Christ with Him, nor in a half state of glory. There is no half glory with Him. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus, accepted in the Beloved. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," etc., etc. If redemption had not given believers a title to be with Him, He could not say (John 17:24), "Father, I will," etc. It is the discovery of the ruin of man that throws us on the redemption that is in Christ. We cannot go higher or lower than that. The utter inability of man shews the efficacy of the blood. In the world Christians

are poor, needy, and feeble; but Christ speaks these things in the world that they might have His joy fulfilled in them. Faith and love are superior to all circumstances, which are no hindrance, unless indeed we are in circumstances contrary to God, which is another thing. Faith has an object. There is living power in Christ. We are kept and enabled by Him to pass through all circumstances unhurt.

How does Christ set us in this place of power? (v. 15). Not taken out of the world, but kept from the evil of it. He sets us in the same position as Himself (v. 16). “They are not of the world “stands good, even as regards our path and position; Christians in the world, in the same place as Christ Himself! How was Christ not of the world? Because He derived not His life from it, but from the Father. The object of that life was the Father. All His walk testifies that the world had nothing to do with the Father. But in passing through this world as the Faithful Witness, all His ways declared that He was not of it. When He who created the world was in it, it knew Him not. “Behold what manner of love,” etc., 1 John 3. The world knows us not because it knew not Him. Our hearts would find consolation here if in conscious fellowship with Jesus. The saint has to go through this world without the support of it, in secret with the Father and sustained by Him. The world cannot know from whence we derive our life, and the saint has to pass through the world without having the power to shew from whence it springs. It is a thing unseen, from on high.

If the world could have acknowledged, We know this is the Son of God, it would have been a son of sustaining power to Jesus; so with the saints, they are not only not understood, but not acknowledged—separated because

their nature comes from God. If we are willing to take this place, we must have it altogether, above and below, for the Father cannot own the world; so it is a place of trial for the saint (v. 17), not merely one act for all, but sanctified by the truth. The life of the saint down here is continued separation. We can put nothing between Christ and the soul, between the Head and the members. There is nothing between the unity of the Father and the Son, nor between the unity of the Christ and the church; but there is such a thing as growing up into the Head. "Sanctified through the truth." There is not only negative opposition to the world on the part of the Christian, but positive opposition. We have to pass through many trials. It is blessed to fall into temptation, etc. (not sinful temptation, of course, as later in James); but there may be circumstances very humbling without sin. Self is to be subdued. In these we see and learn God, when the soul has grown able to judge itself. He is able to uproot and cut off these things as under-suckers of the old stock. The Christian is not only not of the world, as knowing the character of it, but delivered from it (v. 19). We see the position into which the saint gets. The Lord sets Himself apart, that the Spirit may take of the things of Christ and shew them unto us, that we may be more like Christ in the world. The Holy Ghost takes of these things, and comes down in living power to speak of these things to our souls—Father, Son, and Spirit, all work together. There is the Father's love, and the Son's and Spirit's power given unto us. The church and the individual saint stand before the world to shew the power of the Father's love, as the epistle of Christ. I am not speaking of what we have attained unto, but what we are designed to be—where we are set, as our place; and though we have not yet attained to it, wherever we

go there is the living testimony of what the Father's grace has made us. Israel ought to have been what the law required, but mark the difference, failure brought in condemnation to them. We want not righteousness before God; that has been done once. So Hebrews 10:14, "By one offering," etc.; and Romans 8:4, "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," etc.: also Daniel 9:24, "To bring in everlasting righteousness." But for manifestation down here, Paul appeals to the Corinthians for the recommendation of his apostleship. Every believer is a recommendation of the grace of God, shewing what God is. Christ was the living epistle of God on earth. If He took a child in His arms, or whatever He did, He manifested God. He says to us, "Be perfect as your Father," etc., "Love your enemies," etc., that is, let men see in you the Spirit of your Father. We have Christ's place before God, and in the world also—it may be in being hated or persecuted unto death. It is perfectly plain, if Christ sets us out for witnesses, that all question of our acceptance was settled. We must have union and communion with Him. If Christ had not been entirely one with His Father, He could not have represented Him. The church is put in the place of Christ, and sent into the world to tell how great things God has done for her; being on God's behalf the Epistle of Christ written by the Holy Ghost. We are now set in blessed grace, and persons judge of what the profession of Christ is by what Christians are (I do not say always wrongly). If living in communion with God we are not thinking of ourselves. Moses did not know his face shone when every one else did. He had been looking up out of himself, and turned towards earth bearing upon him the light of heaven.

I know so little of Christ, one may say, and this may be true; but every grace that is in Christ is in every saint, though not developed. Supposing you are a babe in Christ, we may see many things in babes to admire and follow after. Where there is true lowliness of heart, I display God, as a babe manifesting Him; but if, as a babe, I am attempting to manifest Christ as a man, there will be failure. My wisdom will be, not to set myself up above that which I really am. If walking in true lowliness and manifesting that measure of Christ which is in us, there will be certain progress in us. It is in the presence of God that sin ought to be found out. I dishonour Christ if I trip in my path. If I see the secret sin in my heart, I shall be humble before God—I shall be humble before the world. If I detect pride, etc., in my heart, I shall go to God and confess it. I may not have power to prevent an unholy thought, but if I resist it, then the Spirit is not grieved thereby; but He brings the soul into communion and fellowship with Christ. This is a process of joy, though humbling. If living with Him, He shews the good in Christ to me; so in our path in this present world, we are partakers of His holiness, being “changed into the same image from glory to glory,” v. 21.

Remark also that unity is spoken of three times in this chapter, the first being absolute unity, as having the very same nature as Christ, the communion of the same divine nature, and one Holy Ghost, and the practical unity that flows from this. “Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.” Now the Spirit dwells in us, and makes us one—not one amongst ourselves, but altogether in the Father and the Son. All question of what the individual is, is lost sight of, and the Father, Son and

Holy Ghost, have communion—we, by the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, are brought into the consciousness of this, all question of acceptance settled. Secondly, not only union, but communion. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” Thirdly, not merely quickened, but He adds (v. 22), glory given to us that was given to Jesus. This is not essential union as the first, nor communion as the second, but thirdly, the display— Christ displayed in the church and Christ displaying the Father. It is “I in them and thou in me”—beginning up there and coming down here—the full display of redemption, when the world will see the oneness, arid the holy angels also, and we, having glory and power from Christ, shall see the Father. The miracles at the beginning were a sample, the power of healing going forth from the church. Christ will be admired in His saints—that holy city (Rev. 21:23, 24), in the light of which the saved nations will walk. The display is, “that the world may know,” etc. Now the world does not know us, but then the world shall know that we have been loved as Christ. But are we to wait to know till the world does? No, by faith, through the revelation of the Holy Ghost, we know now what the world will know by-and-by; we believe before we see. Supposing I have the consciousness that I am loved as the Father loved Jesus, what happiness will be then! My soul filled with this grace will shew it out to others. What a spring of grace is here! The world knows it not, but if I am clothed with grace, I am armed with grace, I am living on the truth and enjoying it now. The Father’s love gave Christ for you and to you. Would the world find

the same grace in you and the same love (in kind, not measure) that Christ exhibited? Are we faithful in bearing about this character of God before the world? God came down here in Christ—in man, that He might display the perfectness of divine dealing and divine tenderness in the form of man. If I am expecting something from you before I shew love, I shall be disappointed, and I shall not manifest God. I must not wait for that, I am to act in grace. It did not matter in one sense what Christ met with from others; He was always satisfied with God. He had all His joy in God. If we were perfectly satisfied with God, this would be perfection. Suppose we have no kind brother to cheer us up under trial, etc., we shall be satisfied so far as we are filled up with what God is. Were you to be left alone for two hours, if not in communion with the Lord, you would crave after a book, etc., proving that God is not enough for you.

In the early church we find the disciples were in favour with all the people. The Man Christ Jesus grew in favour with God and man. He was always the servant of every one. The first thing that struck me some years ago in reading the Gospels was, Here is a man that never did anything for Himself. What a miracle to see a man not living to himself, for He had got God for Himself! Have we realised what we are in Christ, so as to have our hearts filled with Him? God has given us Christ's place in life, then adoption and glory. Therefore the life should shew itself more clearly. Are we seeking His place now? Is there the active energy of the Spirit in you desiring to be all this? Well, this place you have: if merely a babe, or an old man, or a young man, is it not worth having—to

be bearers of the character of Christ, to be trusted with the testimony of Jesus?

Again, there is one thing more in the last verses. He sums up the result of what He had said. Not only has He put us down here one with Himself, but He must have us up there to see all His glory, to be with Him and to be like Him. He counts on our love delighting in His glory.

“O righteous Father,” v. 25. This solemn word is the everlasting separation between the world and Christ. It will never see Him again. He says, The world will not have Me: they have rejected Me. If I am to be approved, those that rejected Me, because I manifested the Father, cannot have a common portion with Me; so now, thou Father, must decide the point. Then we have God’s answer (John 12:31): “Now is the judgment of this world.” When the Holy Ghost came (John 16), it is because of the rejection of Christ. He says, I am here because Christ is there.

“I have declared thy name,” etc. The Lord Jesus sustains us in this. This is what He is doing now; communicating the knowledge of the Father to us, not only in grace, but in the fellowship of the glory. He declares it from the Father’s house and throne according to the knowledge He has of it, as with the Father. The Father, by the Spirit, shews us Jesus at the right hand of God.

“I in them,” v. 26. The blessed Jesus manifests Himself (when done with the world, in a manner it knows not) to His saints. There is a difference between good and spiritual desires and the power of the Holy Ghost taking of the things of Christ and shewing them to us. There is not merely the new nature but the power of the Spirit wanted, if true to Christ. If I take up with other things (I

do not mean sins), there is failure. An idle look even will grieve the Spirit, and I have lost the power of communion. Ours ought not to be a religion of regrets, but a rejoicing of heart continually, love being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. God has set us here as the Epistle of Christ. Let us not seek to be satisfied with looking at ourselves or others, but up unto Him continually, growing in His likeness more and more.

The Man Christ Jesus

Psalm 16

What we find written in the Psalms is primarily connected with the Jews, or the Lord Jesus Himself, and particularly as Messiah. They have a special reference to the godly remnant in the latter day. Many of their expressions wholly belong to the Jews, and cannot be used by the church. Hence, the true solution of those passages which have been such a terrible stumbling to Christians not seeing it. The saints of the present dispensation cannot rightly be looking for the destruction of their enemies, as a way of escape from their sorrows. But in the time of trouble, such as never has been, that is to come, it will be quite proper for the suffering Jews to look for judgments as a way of deliverance. They are God's promises, and what their hope rests upon. But the church looks to be caught up, and escape from sorrow, by being with the Lord in the heavens, whilst it is quite true that she has His sympathy in her sorrow down here. But what the Psalms are chiefly occupied with is the suffering of the soul, the sorrows of the godly Jews and remnant, and God coming in judgment, as their deliverer, by the execution of vengeance on all their foes. Christ is viewed there as associated with Israel, and enters into all the sufferings of the holy remnant. Then there are certain psalms which belong personally to Himself. They shew out the character of the spirit of Christ, as the Gospels shew His walk and work. The Gospels display the one in whom was no selfishness. They tell out the heart that was ready for everybody. No matter how deep His own

sorrow, He always cared for others. He could warn Peter in Gethsemane, and comfort the dying thief on the cross. His heart was above circumstances, never acting under them, but ever according to God in them. We see that He was always sensible to them, and often get in the Psalms expressions of what His heart felt in them: “I am poured out like water.” “My bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax.” He was the tried man; and, as man tried, I am called to follow Him. I should forget self, and the things belonging to self, in shewing love to others. The true effect of being near Christ puts me into fellowship with Himself about others, instead of being under my own circumstances. How can I be turning my heart to the joys of one, and the sorrows of another, unless I am living close to Christ, and getting my heart filled with Him instead of self? What we find all through the life of Christ as shewn out in the Gospels, is the total absence of selfishness, never acting for self in any way whatever. He could rejoice with those who had joy, and grieve with those in sorrow. He could cheer, warn, or rebuke, as need arose. Whatever love dictated, that He did. In Psalm 22 we see Christ alone, suffering under God, enduring the wrath due to sin, but continuing the righteous man, crying unto God, and justifying Him, even when forsaken by Him; or if we look at Him, as in Psalm 69, suffering rather from men, God is still His refuge. His heart goes through all the sorrow sin could bring on one who takes the sinner’s place. He passed through the deepest exercises the heart could endure, but He brings all to God. We find the greatest difficulty often in bringing our sorrow tc God. How can I do so, the soul of some may be saying, as my sorrow is the fruit of my sin? How can I take it to God? If it was suffering for righteousness’ sake, then I would, but I am suffering

for my sin; and can I, in the integrity of my heart towards God, take my sorrows to Him, knowing I deserve them? Yes: Christ has been to God about them. This, then, is the ground on which I can go. There has been perfect atonement for all my sins; Christ has been judged for them. Will God judge us both? No; I go to Him on the ground of atonement, and God can afford to meet me in all my sorrow, because Christ's work has been so perfectly done. In the main, all sorrow is from sin, and all help is grounded upon the atonement. There would be no possibility of my trusting in God, had not all His dealings with sin been put upon another.

God could not be indifferent about sin. Peter knew that, when He said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The holy character of God has been fully exercised in putting away sin. He hath dealt with Christ about it, according to all that He is. I may have to taste the bitterness of its fruits; God may make me to feel the effects of my sin, because He is not going to judge me for it, that "as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ." I get my conscience perfectly purged, through the blood of Christ shed in perfect love. The righteousness of the One who bore my sins is mine. I am declared righteous through the righteousness of Another. My heart is free: I can deal with God about my sin, because He has dealt with Christ on the cross about it. I can go to Him in all my sorrow on account of it. I can confess my sin; yea, more, I can say, "Search me, O God, and try me, … and see if there be any wicked way in me," etc. Through grace I can take the place before God which Christ takes, and the ground for me is the atonement.

We find divine utterance in the Psalms for all our sorrows; and it is blessed to look at them in this way, Christ entered into the full effects of sin, as none other can, in a way we never shall; and, when He had been at the “horns of the unicorn”—the very transit of death, as it were—and had settled every question with God about sin, He could then say, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.” We shall never lose Him as our companion: what a comfort! We shall follow Him to the glory. I am going to be with Him. His presence will be my delight. What a place the saints are brought to in Christ— all sorrow passed!

We get in Psalm 16 expressions of the Lord’s own proper joy—the joy of Him whom God called His Fellow. Peter on the mount of transfiguration would have put Him on a level with Moses and Elias; but God said, No: He is My Fellow, not man’s. When the young man in the gospel went to Him, saying, “Good Master”—coming to Him as man—He said, “Why callest thou me good? there is none good but God.” Goodness was not to be looked for in man, not even in Him if He had been only man. The saints are Christ’s constant delight, and the poor sinner who puts his trust in God has the Lord Jesus for his comforter; and He, having been tempted, knows how to help, as none other can.

In the days of John the Baptist all who repented came to the waters of baptism: Jesus did the same. He could not repent, but He would not be separated from them, and said, “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” I will take My place with you, with the saints in the earth.

What abundant consolation faith gives the man who hangs on God! Christ when down here could say, “I have set Jehovah always before me”; and should not I? In the details of life, do I not constantly need Him? How continually I get moved by circumstances! He alone can stay me. Christ once took a dependent place. He was raised by the power of the Spirit, through God the Father. He could have raised Himself; “death hath no more dominion over him.” The Son was the Father’s delight. The Father’s heart was bound up in the Son. The Lord Jesus Christ was all the Father’s delight.

Christ is in His presence as Man and for man, as our Forerunner and our way. It is so blessed to look at Christ as the way; it brings Him so near to us. As surely as I have, as a man, partaken of the first Adam’s nature, and the consequences of his sin, so have I as a believer a portion in the second Adam. The Lord Jesus Christ is in the presence of God for me. There are truly difficulties down here; but I shall be with Him where there are joys for evermore. God will be glorified as God, but He will be displayed as Man also; and, as in Christ, we shall share the glory. How gracious and truly blessed those words, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” He will be with His saints, and His saints with Him. They shall be conformed to His image; they shall be displayed in His likeness. We shall see Him, and we shall be like Him; and now, in the measure we are looking at Him, are we transformed into His image.

It is our positive portion, and in communion with Him we share what He is. His delight is with the saints. He entered into their deepest sorrow, and they shall share His joy and glory, as exalted on high. How am I acting towards Him now? Do I take all my concerns to Him? Do I make Him the uppermost thought in all my need, in every exercise of soul, and also in my seasons of joy? This is the way to learn Him, and to know the love that is in His heart.

There is no condition but what I may have Him for my companion in. He has gone into the fullest depths of my sorrow. “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts,” He could say. There is not a place faith cannot find Christ in. “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 the heavens, that he might fill all things.” But am I going on in the world with Him? Are my joys such as I can share along with Him? Am I walking with Him in my every-day life? If I am in sorrow, how far has He lifted me up? If I am resting on Him, He has lifted me up, and this is my positive privilege. The heart that is cast upon Christ finds constant comfort. The heart that keeps close to Christ gets nothing apart from Him. See Psalm 23. If I have a question of want, I can say, there is no fear, “the Lord is my shepherd.” Am I saying, I am in green pastures, but they will be soon gone? Nay, He maketh me to “he down “in them. Then there are “still waters,” but may they not be shortly troubled? How is that, when Christ leads me beside them? My heart is sorrowful; I have wandered away from Him. This is sad. But Christ “restoreth my soul”; and if I have to walk through the valley of the shadow of

death, He will be with me, and will comfort me. Ah! but I am in the land of my enemies. What of that? Christ prepares a table for me in their very presence. “Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

How blessed it is to look at the Lord in this way! He is our present and eternal joy. The time will come when all our sorrow will be over, but our Friend will remain. He is our tried and true Friend. He has entered into the deepest woes of our heart, and will make us the sharers of His joy for ever. Our blessing, our safety, our hope are all grounded on the atonement. Is there a soul reading this who cannot rejoice in Christ, who knows Him not as his portion? Is there one who is saying, My sin is too great to be pardoned? To feel about your sin is right, but to be in despair about it is quite wrong. You are virtually saying, My sin is greater than the grace of God. You will not dare to say so if you are looking at Christ. Is Christ come short? Is grace beneath your need or above it? Christ is the portion of every poor soul who believes on Him. The atoning work is done. The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth from all sin.

The Good Shepherd And The Sheep

John 10

The more we study the ways of the Lord Jesus, the more we shall find what is unfathomable in goodness and beauty. In this chapter what extremes meet in reference to Him! What power, and yet what submission! There are heights of moral glory, and yet depths of humiliation. He presents Himself as the Son of God, and yet He enters in by the door, and has the porter opening to Him.

The Person of the Lord Jesus will always afford food for our souls, if we study Him; and while we shall be humbled by it, we shall be strengthened with the consciousness that all that He is He is for us. The heart delights in Him as one it can feel as its own, and yet admire and adore.

At this time the Lord had been fully putting Israel to the test. Chapters 8 and 9 shew us how entirely He was rejected. In chapter 8 His word is rejected, and in chapter 9 His works. Thus the result of His coming is, that He is cast out, and He says, “For judgment I am come into the world”; and because of their treatment of Him they are culpably guilty. “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now, ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” Then He as much as goes on to say, Not one bit of it is in vain. He has come as He ought, and in the prescribed way, “by the door”; and God would own and make good His coming, though He was rejected and set at naught. All His sheep should come to Him, and He could say, “I have spent my strength for naught and in vain, and yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and

my work with my God." If He had come acknowledged as a king in glory and power, He would have had many follow Him; but now, though He was the lowly and despised One, He would have all who really wanted Him. "He that entereth not by the door, but climbeth up some other way, is a thief and a robber." All these great messiahs, setting up to be some one (and there were plenty of them), were no better than "thieves and robbers." We see at once here who it is that comes in by the door, and the first thing we find in Him is absolute submission; and notice that this, though true of the Shepherd primarily, is true also of all who follow the Shepherd. All power and real effective service will be found to spring from entire submission.

There was entire rejection for Jesus, as He said, "Dogs have compassed me," and again, "My bones are out of joint, my heart is like wax." It was a painful thing thus to be met— everything deepening and darkening towards death as He passed along, but He went through it all, and thus entered in by the door in perfect submission. Those who found Him must be brought into the same place too, for it was there He found them. See the blind man: where did he find Him? In the place of his rejection. Christ is before him when they "cast him out." There is not one such poor sheep whom His voice cannot reach. He meets souls just where they need Him; in distress or difficulty, no matter what, He suffers Himself for them. He went in by the door, and He was the true shepherd—not of Israel indeed, for they as a people rejected Him; but He is the shepherd of the sheep—of all whose consciences and hearts were touched. He is "the shepherd of the sheep." Does He use His power in claiming them for Himself? No! He is the submissive

One coming in perfect dependence on God. Thus, when Lazarus was dead, He did not move until He had a word from God to do it. He took the form of a servant; and a servant must be dependent and obedient.

“To him the porter openeth.” “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” He was here in complete humiliation, and this was His perfectness as man. God, His Father, does not spare Him the suffering, but He opens the door. As a fact He has come, and the sheep hear His voice. Though trodden upon by the goats in the way, He does not care for it, but goes after the sheep; and the sheep know that He cares for them. They understand that He has an interest in them, for they “hear his voice.” Why did He bear all the contempt poured upon His words and works, Son of God as He was? It was for the sake of the sheep. He was content to bear the trampling of the goats for the sake of the sheep amongst them.

Then, again, there is perfect ability in Him to deliver them. He is not going to leave them amongst the goats. No: “he leadeth them out.” He draws their hearts: He makes Himself known to them, and charges Himself with their safety and deliverance. “He goeth before them.” “When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them.” What then? are there no dangers and difficulties in the way? With Israel, when brought out of Egypt, and over the sea, were they in no danger of losing their way? Yes: but there was the cloud to guide them. Was there no danger from enemies in the way? Yes: but there was the captain of Jehovah’s host. So now with His sheep, He leads them out, and does not leave them. He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him. See what certainty is found here.

Persons may make this remark or that; but if I know it is Christ's voice, it is enough for me. "Let us go forth therefore to him without the camp." It is not now for me to remain in the Jewish fold. "He leadeth them out." But some will say, How do you know it is not your own will you are following? It says, "They know his voice." The sheep know the voice of Christ, and if they have not got His voice, they stop until they have. There is one voice they know. There are plenty of other voices, but they do not know them. Sheep are silly, stupid creatures; but they know the Shepherd's voice— that one voice. The moment Christ's voice has reached me, it is enough; and this gives a peace and quietness in one's path that nothing else does. It is not great wisdom or great strength that gives this, but it is hearing the Shepherd's voice and knowing it. If not the Shepherd's voice, it is dreaded. "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him." The Shepherd does not frighten. He gives strength and confidence; and, His voice having once reached the heart, nothing else is needed. This is when the eye is single. If double, a man is unstable in all his ways—not in one, but in all.

Never was divine love so shewn forth as in Christ coming down so low; and it was because He is what He is that He could do it. If Adam left his first estate, it was sin; but Christ could humble Himself, and it was the perfectness of love. While He entered in Himself by the appointed way, He is the door—the entrance to the way for every one else. They would not, as Jews, have been warranted in leaving the Jewish fold, if Christ had not come as the door into another thing. He was the warrant, and so with us. By Him we may come out and enter in and find peace and blessing. What marks the

sheep is that Christ is their door. He is the door for the sheep. They could not say they were saved because Jews, though they had God's oracles and much advantage every way; it was only by Christ they could be saved. Mark, it says, "If any man enter in, he shall be saved." It does not say, if they follow on well, but if they "enter in." There must be the real hearing the voice of the good Shepherd. If he enters in, he is saved; and he cannot enter in without being saved. Then there is a path to follow, doubtless; but that is the result of being saved. We shall find it difficult oft-times, Satan tripping us up, the world and the flesh; but the door is to "go in and out" by. There is liberty of heart. I can go out into the world to testify of Christ, because my soul is in the safeguard of Christ Himself; not pent up in ordinances, nor in monasticism. There is food also, and they "find pasture." They enjoy all the truth of God's word.

Christ's sheep thus have safety too. "None can pluck them out of my Father's hand." They have liberty, "go in and out," and they have all the food God can give. They "find pasture," and what more will they have? They will have the glory by-and-by. Then He contrasts Himself with all these false teachers that have gone before, and says of Himself, "I am come that they might have life." Not content with giving life only, He gives it "more abundantly"; as in Romans, "They that receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ." Here we serve in life; then we shall reign in life. What liberty, what abundance of all things it gives, when we see that He is our life! He gives life more abundantly. Cost what it will, He is intent on saving them. "He giveth his life for the sheep." As though He said, I am devoted to you, and I

am determined to get you out of this wretched place in which you are: I will get you out, cost what it will. “I am the good shepherd, and I lay down my life for the sheep.” He has so given His sheep life, and now He will give all that they want in life. (See the contrast of these hireling shepherds.) It might be said, if He has given His life for them, He can do nothing more. But no! it is not so with Him. See verse 14, “I know my sheep and am known of mine.” There is not only caring for the flock as a whole, but for the individual sheep: “and am known of mine.” Paul knew He “loved the church, and gave himself for it”; and he knew also that He loved him, and gave Himself for him. Then there is as true a relationship of love between Christ and the sheep now as there is between Him and His Father (v. 14, 15).

Further, “There shall be one flock, one shepherd.” Jew and Gentile were to be brought into the church of God. “Therefore doth my Father love me,” He says, “because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” This shews the wonderful value of the work done. It is a motive for the Father’s love! Yet however low He might go, even to laying down His life, He could take it up again. He had power [title or authority] to do it; but He was in the place of obedience. “This commandment have I received of my Father.” He had power, but He was the obedient servant. What a difference there is between Him and us! We could not take up our lives again, if we laid them down. It was in virtue of His divine title and power, as well as love, that He came so low for us.

Verse 19 (and downwards) shews us the different way in which the Jews heard and received His sayings to what His sheep do. Christ’s voice has power in the heart, and

this is the secret of the difference between them and the goats.

And, again later on, see the full security and extent of blessing they have in virtue of the Shepherd's title and power. "I give unto them eternal life." It is a life that is eternal, not that which is to be taken away again. Whoever has heard Christ's voice has eternal life. It must be eternal life that Christ gives; for if one of His sheep could perish, Christ must perish. And it must be a holy life, too, that He gives, for the same reason. What Christ gives must be holy, for He is holy. "They shall never perish." A sheep is a perishing thing; but His sheep do not perish. We may fall asleep, or we may be changed; but the same life that we have now in Him and with Him we shall have then at His coming. There are two points in which this blessed security consists. First, Christ is in them, as their life; secondly, "None shall pluck them out of my hand." They are in His hand. The Father has given us to Christ, and He is to do the work for us. The Father's love is concerned, and He is able to do it all. You must get some one more powerful than God, if you can be plucked out of His hand. The Father sent the Son and the Son has sent the Spirit, so that all three are concerned in our salvation.

There is then salvation, and eternal life for the sheep; but how are we to know who are the sheep? They are those who know His voice. How sweet the thought that, as the Shepherd, He leads them all the way! It is hearing Christ's voice that distinguishes the Christian, though there are sorrows and troubles, difficulties and perplexities. Hearing Christ's voice has absolute authority and power for him, "perplexed but not in despair."

How wonderful that He should have thus come down to let us hear His voice! How precious here to be taught that Jesus and the Father are one, that the glory of the Son's Person is identified with the security of the sheep, both against inward weakness and outward violence, as it is with the height and depth of the love of which the sheep were the objects! The Father and the Son are one in divine essence, as they are in efficacious love to the sheep.

The Power Of Christ In Resurrection And Glory

Or, Thoughts On Philippians 3 And Mark 10

In Philippians 3 we have a striking illustration of the effect produced by the Holy Ghost in a soul which was indwelt by Him. As to the outward walk, what a brilliancy does He give! What stability before God! What true liberty! For the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to the soul; and the soul perceives Him so clearly, that all that is not Christ is rejected as being opposed to Him.

It is important to remark the contrast which exists between such a one and the man who is not full of the Holy Ghost, though he may be, or may seem to be, powerfully drawn toward Christ Jesus, or may even be as truly a convert as were the disciples. We shall see this contrast connected in succession with righteousness, the cross, and the glory, if we compare Philippians 3:4-11 and Mark 10:17-40.

In the history given us in Mark 10:17-27 we see a man whose position is in contrast with that of the apostle (in Phil. 3), which shews in a striking manner the effect produced by the Holy Spirit. The apostle had left all for Christ. Advantages, in which a Jew could boast, he had had beyond what the young man referred to in Mark 10 possessed. He had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, the most celebrated Rabbi; he was a citizen of Tarsus, a city renowned (if we adopt modern phraseology) as a university; he had been well trained in all the acquirements of the day. Moreover, he was privileged in having led a blameless life, as he tells us in

verse 6. All this was very precious to him as a man, so long as he had not seen Christ. All that a man can pride himself in, Paul possessed. If any thought that the flesh might be gloried in, Paul could shew that he had more therein than they. But Christ in glory revealed Himself to Paul, and then he could say, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss, etc., that I might win Christ.” What was the state of Paul’s soul? I must gain Christ. This is all I have to do, my whole, sole business; everything else found in my pathway is but loss. Such is the effect produced by the Spirit of God in the soul which possesses Him. The apostle is troubled by nothing that he meets on his way: he sees as clear as noonday that all that is not Christ is loss. He sees Christ in the midst of every set of circumstances. Are they circumstances of suffering? So much the better; there will be the more of Christ. Christ is there: he sees Him by the help of God.

In comparing this with Mark 10 the contrast is seen, namely of a man who has not the Spirit: for this chapter presents us with one in circumstances similar to Paul, but not full of the Holy Ghost. He is portrayed, however, as a man of a character altogether lovely; but Christ was not his object, and natural loveliness availed naught. Yet his character was such that it attracted the attention of the Lord. Jesus “loved him,” v. 21. He also was as to the law blameless. A Jew, he supposed that he was to have eternal life by the law. His thought as to Jesus was. That is the man that can tell me what I must do in order to inherit eternal life. The pure, excellent, and perfect character of the Lord had convinced him that the knowledge of the most excellent commandment might be learned from Him; and He hastens to Him. He was

ardent in his desire to know what he had to do, and he drew near to Jesus with all possible respect, with “Good Master “(Jesus received not this praise from one who regarded Him only as a man), he even kneels before the Lord. There was something very lovely in the character of him who could say (and the Lord admits it as a truth) “All these things have I kept from my youth up.” But the Lord puts his heart to the proof, in order to make manifest what are the motives which sway it, and He does so by means of the cross: “Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, etc., and come take up the cross and follow me.”

However lovely and estimable the young man may have been, he does not take up the cross. When the state of his heart is in question, he has no will for what is Christ’s. He looked for righteousness in the law; and Christ, present with him, succeeds not in engaging him in another course. He said not, as Paul, “I have suffered the loss of all things, and do esteem them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

Such was the effect produced by the Holy Ghost in Paul by the revelation to him of a Christ in glory. Paul saw Christ and said, That is my righteousness, I make no count of my own. He desires not to have a human but a divine righteousness. We cannot have both; for if God gives me His righteousness, I do not present to Him that which is of myself.

Now, suppose that I had kept all the law and am without fault; such a righteousness would not be of God, but that

of a man. The law of God requires that man shall love God and his neighbour; and this is what man does not do; but even supposing that I had kept His law in its fullest extent, I should only have a human righteousness, whereas I have a far better righteousness in Christ, even that of God Himself. Does the law demand that I should give my life in order to glorify God, and that, too, in behalf of worthless sinners? Of a truth I should not know how to obey such a commandment; but Christ has done so; He could say, “I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”; and He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The manner, too, in which Christ gave Himself up on the cross altogether exceeds all that we could have done, even if we suppose that we had the power to fulfil the law. Christ has glorified God as man, and is now glorified with God. It was thus that Paul saw Him, and he virtually said, That is the righteousness which suits me well.

In how amazing a manner has God been manifested in Christ Jesus! By faith I see Him on the cross, and I say to myself, I cannot do without that glorious work; for from the moment that righteousness is of Christ it is no longer of me. Paul, when he saw Christ, had this thought, Behold in heaven the One who has communicated to me a divine righteousness; and his expression necessarily is “that I may … be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God.” So long as we seek a human righteousness, it is evident we do not know the righteousness which is of God. Paul, having seen the glory of God, stops not before he has said, I shall be there where Christ has the right to be. He is entered

into heaven with a divine righteousness. There is my place too: all else is but dung and dross. Yes, all else is for me loss.

If Christ is thus before our eyes, all that is not Christ is an embarrassment. We must win Christ. Faith, having once apprehended the righteousness of God, can no longer put up with the righteousness of man; to faith there is a needs-be to walk in a more excellent way. The riches which the young man valued had no longer any attraction for the heart of Paul; he had seen Christ and God's righteousness in glory, the end and prize of the heavenly calling.

In Mark 10:25 Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Great was the astonishment of all; and they said, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus concealed not the truth. It was impossible with man, but all things were possible with God! As to man, however excellent may be his pretensions, it is impossible: he loves money; he is ambitious. To cut the matter short, if man's ability to save himself is in question, Jesus Christ declares it is impossible. But let us suppose that we have left all, as Peter said, "Lo! we have left all and followed thee"; and in truth they had, by the grace of God, really followed Jesus. The hearts of the disciples were really attached to Jesus; affection was really awakened in them towards Him. They had done that, grace helping, which the young man could not make up his mind to do; even as the Lord said, "Verily I say unto you, There is no one that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, etc., for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time … with persecutions, and in the world to come

eternal life." You have been obliged to break, for My sake, ties here below: well, you shall find the same, stronger and more perfect, among the children of God; and, at the end, eternal life. There are souls who have apprehended these things, and who have set out, and that sincerely, as pilgrims with Jesus; but on that road we have to follow Jesus, and Jesus has passed by way of the cross: we shall meet then that which will fully put us to the proof.

"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him." We may say to ourselves, perhaps, what a blessed thing to have Jesus immediately before us! But the disciples were amazed; we desire to be in the way with Christ and to follow Him, but we are ignorant of what the cost may be; the disciples walked in it, and they found what the difficulty was: if Jesus went to Jerusalem, it was to be put to death there. The Jews would crucify Him, yet go thither He would. His disciples were filled with fear as they followed, because they had not the Holy Ghost; still they forsook not as yet their Master, yet they were amazed and in trouble.

Jesus is the good Shepherd; He leads forth His sheep, He walks before them and the sheep follow Him. The disciples were afraid as they followed Jesus, Jesus led them to the cross. The cross is on the road which leads to glory. Well! that was just what Paul desired. The disciples were amazed and afraid; Paul's state (Phil. 3) was far different, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death." Instead of

being frightened, Paul thought, I shall be partaker of the sufferings of Christ. I shall then have much more of Him; I shall die to sin, to the world; I shall be much more conformed to the likeness of Christ, and all that destroys the flesh destroys that which hides Christ. It was no imaginary danger; Paul's trial was at hand—the alternatives of the question were life or death. Death was before him, but he saw that it was the means of having more of Christ; so that he said, I willingly take all that, for it is Christ. He had no desire to have sufferings, but to have the fellowship of His sufferings, to be made conformable unto His death.

For us the cross is light in comparison with that which Paul had to suffer. Nevertheless, it is the cross which takes from us all that which hinders our realising Christ in glory. What a contrast between the disciples, amazed and afraid, when going up to Jerusalem to the cross was in question, and the apostle Paul, who gloried in everything that could communicate to him anything more of Christ! He knew that, in passing through death, he should die to death. When Christ died, He died not as to communion with the glory of the Father. On the contrary He therein only realised that He had done with the guilt which, for our sakes, pressed heavily upon Him, done with the world which was a desert land—a land of drought where no water was. Death was to Him to depart and enjoy in His Father's presence, eternal blessedness; for us death is not aught else.

Therefore, as Christ said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," so Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." If death gives us more conformity to Christ, we need not stop to consider what suffering the flesh may find therein; we find our profit in it, because it is death

to all that is not Christ, and we glory in it because it makes us more like to Christ. Is the cross before me? Good! I shall have more of Christ; the energy of the Spirit makes me say, “If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection.” I see Christ in glory; well, I desire to be as He is and to be with Him. I desire to possess Him just as I see Him; and if to gain that, or a fuller measure of it, I must pass through death; to me to die is gain. Where there is the energy of the Spirit, there is light, and a single eye which makes us judge that Christ is worth all, and that all else is worth nothing: and this purines the saint’s heart.

In Mark 10:35 we have James and John asking of Jesus to place them one on the right and the other on the left. They desired a good place in the kingdom. James and John had faith; spite of the dangers which they saw on the road to Jerusalem, they believed that Jesus would have the glory and the kingdom, and they said, At all events give us a good place. But about whom were they thinking? About James and John. Then Jesus speaks to them of drinking of the cup and again sets the cross before them, subjecting them to the will of the Father, even as He Himself was obedient thereunto.

Here we have a step in advance. The question is of glory; but the Holy Spirit has no fellowship with this self. The heart is not delivered from it until the Spirit has guided our thoughts to Jesus. So was it with Paul, in whom we find altogether another thing than ‘myself’—(I will labour hard to have a good place). Paul is occupied with Christ more than with Paul—“That I may win Christ.” It was the Spirit who thus set Christ before him. The power of the Spirit had so directed his thoughts to Jesus, that Paul is, as it were, lost in Jesus. The effectual

presence of the Spirit crucifies egotism and gives us freedom of thought about ourselves while on the way; it occupies us with but one object—Jesus: to be conformed to the pattern and to look to Him is all that we have to do, and this purifies the heart.

Paul laboured more than they all; and therefore, in a certain sense according to man's thoughts, he has a title to the most excellent place; yet he did all, just because he did not seek such a place, but he sought Christ alone. If he win Christ, what a righteousness! If there be sufferings by the way, well, it is but conformity to Christ; if death, it is gain; for we look for the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our vile bodies, and render them like unto His own glorious body.

Paul thinks not of himself; the Spirit fills him with Christ Himself, and all that conceals from him Christ and His worth is rejected. The Spirit gives clearness of view and repose to the heart through the knowledge of the righteousness of God. Then we desire to have Christ, to possess Him, and we find what is the way thereunto. To Jerusalem and the cross! No matter; it is the cross of Christ, and Christ on the cross and Christ with the cross, but it is naught less than the divine righteousness which we have in Him.

In Mark we have the young man who would not abandon his riches and take up the cross, in order to have heaven; then the disciples following Jesus in fear, yet following. In Philippians 3 we see Paul following the Lord without fear and with joy, whatsoever sufferings might be his, because he loved Christ, as Christ, for His own sake. The important matter is for each of us to have Christ in Himself, which gives a pure heart and a single

eye; and to have Christ so entirely our all that all our business may be to possess Him, and in view of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, to count all things but dung and dross. Again, approved by Him and filled with Himself, we shall be in peace according to the righteousness which God Himself has given to us.

The Believer Entering Into God’s Rest

Hebrews 4

That which is specially set before us in this chapter is the comparison of the state of Israel in the wilderness and our analogous state with the entering into God’s rest.

We are apt continually to be referring something to ourselves, even when we acknowledge that it is grace that begins the work. We are still making ourselves the centre of our thoughts; and in thinking of heaven our thought is the thought of our getting there. The rest is ours, no doubt, just as the salvation is ours; but then we know its value much better when we know that it is God’s salvation. It is so with the rest; and the more we can bring our souls to lean upon God, whether as it respects salvation, sanctification, or the rest, or heaven, or glory to come—regarding it as God’s rest, God’s heaven, God’s glory, as much as it is God’s sanctification and God’s salvation—the more shall we understand our full blessing. We never get a blessing in its true value, until we see that it is all God’s. If I am thinking of my rest, I shall be thinking of my toil and my labour. This is true, but this is not the measure of the rest: in order to get the full measure it must be God’s—something so good and so blessed, that it can be God’s rest. It is mine, because He has brought me into it; but I never learn the full power of it until I learn that it is what God has wrought for His glory, according to the perfections of God, and not according to the wants of him who needs it. This truth of God’s being in the thing enters also into all my thoughts of that into which He is bringing me.

God is the first leading thought of all that I hold precious in Christ.

He acts in grace by our wants, and toward our wants; but He does, by and through our wants, lead us to know what the God is to whom we are brought. He does not say simply you ought to be holy; but He chastens us that we may be made partakers of His holiness. Why so? Because God is acting from Himself towards us. His great delight is to act from Himself towards us. This is true grace; and I never know the spring of blessing, of joy, of happiness, of peace to my soul, until I know God acting from Himself in grace.

In all God's dealings with His creatures, there are two great principles—responsibility, and the source of life. Even in the garden of Eden there was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was man's responsibility; and also the tree of life. This is true also to us. Man, as a sinner, has a responsibility to God; and likewise as a saint, though the latter in grace. Angels are responsible to do His pleasure. All are responsible to God: but if the creature is to be blessed, he must have God's grace as the spring of life to his soul.

That is the grand difference which God has brought out between law and grace. The law dealt with man's responsibility. The law said, "Do this, and thou shalt live." But though given as a rule, it really came to be the test of man's estate, and as much as says, There you are, and that is what you are responsible for; and therefore it never could give rest or make perfect. God gave law as the measure of man's responsibility; but this responsibility could not be the allowance of sin: its measure, as given of God, must be according to what

man ought to be before God. God could give no other: and hence, though ordained to life, the sinner found it to be unto death; because it brought to light the sin, and the law of sin, which could not be subject to the law of God. It never was a guide to man. You cannot guide a will opposed to God. You can never guide a sinner by law to righteousness. It is the perfect rule of man's responsibility; but it gave nothing, while it required everything. You cannot talk, if blessing is to be sought, of requiring from a sinner; for a sinner is in principle bad, and the requisition becomes the proof of it. What use, save for condemnation, to say, "Thou shalt not lust" to a man who has lust in his nature? You cannot guide a will opposed to God. The effect of the law was to discover man's condition. The law of sin in his members was what he was; the law of God was what he ought to be. Paul was not guilty of immorality; but when it said, "Thou shalt not lust," there was no hope for him; it was all over with him, because there was the detection of what he was. The law could not be a guide for man, who had lust in his nature. It was but the means of discovering that all he could produce was sin, making the law the minister of condemnation. The ten commandments were the prohibition of man's natural state, the last saying, "Thou shalt not lust." The law, therefore, was not condemning merely what I had done, but my nature. It prohibited that which the sinner really was, and found him even in that state which it came to prohibit. You can give no rule to a man's sinful state; the law, which is a true rule to it, only acts to detect the lust and sinful wanderings of the will in his nature.

Then we come to another thing. We learn that God is the source of grace and life to those in this condition, and

what in grace He does for man in this condition. Here we must begin altogether with God. In Romans God discovers man as a sinner, shewing what he is, Jew or Gentile; and then presents the blood of Jesus. And there again He takes up man's righteousness, contrasts it with His own, and shews its nothingness. As it regard's man's glory, it was all gone; all that was wasted and destroyed by sin. Of God's glory he was altogether short; but God brings in Christ's glory—His own glory in Christ. Christ is God's man set up in perfect righteousness to be the head of a new creation. God becomes the source of life in this new creation. He brings in glory when all was spoilt by sin. It is His rest after all that has passed. If it is life, glory, righteousness—it is the life of God, the glory of God, the righteousness of God. There is no rest, worthy of those who possess the life and the glory and the righteousness of God, but the rest of God. God makes us partakers of His holiness; He does not demand it (though in another and a practical sense this might be said); so likewise He makes us partakers of His rest.

The labour of a saint is of God, not that of a sinner; the sinner labours of man, he is seeking to work so as to satisfy God. He may be honest and sincere in that; but it is all based on the thought that man must work up to God. The end of it all is, he finds a law in his members so that he can never satisfy God. That which man does under the law is labouring up to God. "O wretched man that I am" is its end, even where the desire and understanding are right concerning it. There is the saint's labour in Christ in 1 Thessalonians 1—the labour of love. Christ's labour (while faithful under the law indeed) was not up to God, but from God. It all came from God—flowed from Him as the source and spring of

it all; and such is the labour of the saint. Persons suppose that when a believer labours, it must be to get up to God; and if not, of what use is it to labour. Miserable thought! The saint's labour is the sort of labour which was in Christ, when He came from God to work the works of God. Still that is not rest; labour is not rest. We have not ceased from our works. We have rest of conscience, it is true, but not rest from the labour of love.

The Hebrews were in danger of slipping back into the law, like the Galatians, and of ending in the flesh, having begun in the Spirit. The labouring up to God is a very different thing from labouring from God. The labouring from God has the consciousness first of being in God. So in Hebrews 3:6, "Hold fast the beginning of your confidence stedfast unto the end." Here is the labour of love—holding the treasure committed to them, being in bodies of flesh. And also there is conflict with what would dispute our progress, like the children of Israel walking through the wilderness. There is nothing in this world, nor of this world, which could refresh the new man, any^ more than there is in heaven to satisfy the old man. We are in danger, as the children of Israel, of getting weary of the way.

When Joshua got into the land, there were fleshly enemies in the earthly Canaan; we also have spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places to contend with. We do not obtain any promise without a spiritual victory. This is not rest. What, then, is the rest of God? In order to have God's rest we must have His mind in order that we may delight; in what He delights in. If so, I never can have complete rest until things are in accordance with God's mind. God may act in grace in, and towards, things as

they are now; but He cannot take His rest in them. Therefore Jesus says, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,” John 5:17. God has no sabbath now, so to speak. I see the consequences of sin weighing down the hearts of sinners, and I cannot rest.

There is one preliminary to all this: if you are at war with God, and uncertain whether it is a question of judgment against you, or if under the law, there is not rest. The first thing is to have the great question—your subjection to Christ, and so acceptance with God through the cross—settled, and then the conscience gets rest. If I am uncertain whether God will save me, I cannot speak of rest; the conscience must first have rest. And here be it observed, that when God deals with man as to rest of conscience, it is not what man is to do, but what he is; not what is the fruit merely, but what is the tree. Man may bring many offerings, and God dashes them all away, and says, I have to do with you, and you with Me; the condition of your soul is what I have to do with: and then all question of man’s working is set aside. See Micah 6:7. The fountain is foul. Things are traced up to the fountain, and this is unclean. Something may be introduced into the stream to make the water more sweet, but itself is ever foul: this cannot satisfy God. But God has settled the question by putting sin out of the way by the blood of Jesus.

When the grace of the gospel is presented, it may be received very sincerely, and yet often without the full practical discovery of the evil within, or of the law of sin in the members, to the extent that is afterwards learnt practically; and the result is, that, in measure, the knowledge of the grace of God is superficial, and the soul often gets alarmed. But whenever the soul has been

really brought to the experimental knowledge of the law of sin working in the members, and the grace of God in dealing with sin in Christ Jesus; then it knows that God is for us, thus evil as we were, and so ceases to be harassed by the workings of the law. God's grace has judged the condition of the sinner, thus fully shewn, and put away the sin by Christ; and we have only to adore and praise Him for what He has done. The sin has been imputed to Christ, and He has put it away, and that is all, and the conscience has peace. The soul knows God, not as under the law, but under grace. This being settled, we have altogether ceased from our anxieties; as it regards the conscience, we have peace then through the blood of Christ. But this is preliminary to all true labour, and to the divine rest.

For if we would consider the subject before us, the rest is like the first rest. When God had made everything, He ceased from His works. Sin has destroyed His rest. It may be modified by a number of things, but there is nothing which God rests in, for evil is all around; and where we have Satan's power to contend with, there can be no rest to the saints. Not that we have any uncertainty of the rest; but by virtue of the joy, through the Holy Ghost, of entering into this rest, we groan on account of all around. God cannot rest in the corruption of sin, in the world as it now is; and therefore He is bringing in the new man to rest in a new state of things, which He creates for Himself. But it is not in rest yet, while in the midst of evil; therefore there remaineth a rest (v. 9). The believer does not groan because he is not accepted; he does not groan out, "Oh, wretched man that I am"; but, as he gets further discoveries of God, he longs to be with Him. The heart of the renewed man

rests in the rest which God has accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ, as to judgment, for there is God's rest; and it looks for the rest which He is about to fulfil in Christ.

As God satisfied Himself with mere creation blessedness before the fall (placing man in the midst of it), He likewise will be so satisfied in the new creation as to plant the second Man there. This never will be spoiled; and He cannot rest until He has accomplished all His purpose, and brought the Lord Jesus Christ into all that scene of blessedness; and this is God's rest: and that is the rest into which we are to be brought; a rest fit for the new man in Christ. The more I look at the Lord Jesus, as God has accepted Him, the more my desires flow after this rest.

When rest of conscience is obtained, I find there is a work to be done in the meanwhile by the Spirit working in love and in energy in the new nature. I have joy in God looking up; I serve God looking down. There is a work going on in the patience of hope and labour of love. Moreover the saint finds that within him which is contrary to this life of faith—something that hinders him in this life of service. Besides the opposition from without, there is that in him which tends to mar his undivided purity of service. Just as Paul found a tendency to be puffed up: the flesh would say to him that nobody had been in the third heavens but himself; when he went about that blessed work, his having been in the third heavens would give the flesh an occasion for abusing this grace; and therefore he had the thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. This was very profitable, but it was not rest; it was not sin, the thorn he had to contend with, but it was what checked the tendency to sin. We are in the conflict; and in the work

of faith and labour of love, we make the discovery, not of that which is imputed to us as sin, but of that which hinders us from fully glorifying God in the work and service of love.

Many a saint considers himself in Egypt because he finds himself in conflict. This is wrong. If Israel had not been redeemed out of Egypt they never would have had to contend with the Canaanites; we must not confound bondage to Pharaoh with conflict against the Amalekites and Canaanites.

All through this conflict, what is the standard of the path of the saint who has got this hope (v. 12)? why talk of falling? —"lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief," v. 11. Because the constant tendency of the flesh in the saint is to that to which it will bring the unrenewed professor, and would bring us, were we not kept of God. It is the working of my will. I get away from the strength of God, and therefore this allusion to the falling in the wilderness. How does God work in this? He sends His word, which detects the things which lead to falling. "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The word is the light which shews him that which is in his heart, which would tend to this fall. The thing which produces the danger is detected by the searching fight of the word (v. 12). Now it is that the soul does not shrink from the light; but, as in Psalm 139, says, "Search me, O God." But O, what confidence that is, what amazing confidence! Is there anything that can prove such confidence in grace as that? Could any, who thought God would impute the sin, say, "See if there be

any way of wickedness within me”? The moment he knows that God has wrought salvation and quickened him in the grace of Christ, he can say that.

But God detects the evil, and chastens His saints to prevent their stumbling in the way. He looks well to see if there is any evil in their hearts, in order to strip from them evil, and prevent their falling. And this brings the one who has tasted of the rest to go on; and God never rests until He brings us into what satisfies His desire: “He shall rest in his love.” God’s love never rests until He has brought us into that which satisfies His desires, not our desires. Where shall we find the measure of His love? even in what God has done in glorifying His Son, and putting everything into His hands, and bringing us into the same measure of blessing. He meets us in His love, and brings us with Him into life, glory, and blessedness. When He has redeemed us, He puts us through trial and conflict, that the old man may be completely judged, and that we may be delivered from the power and works of the old man.

All along through this conflict we have the sustaining power of Christ our High Priest, who intercedes for us, and watches over us, while passing through it. “Seeing then, that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession,” v. 14.

The first thing is, to be brought into this great place of service for God. There must be the realisation that redemption has been accomphshed and settled; that we are altogether accepted in Christ Jesus.

The grace which has blotted out every sin will impute none at all. If a tittle of sin could be imputed to man, it

would be all over with him. In order to stand in the presence of God, there must be no sin between us and God. Then there is the thorough and complete searching of the old man, in order to the enjoyment of all blessing by the new man. When perfected in glory, in God’s presence, it will be the rest of God for us.

Life In The Son

John 5

The main subject in the Gospel of John is life. “The Word was with God, and the Word was God… In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” The first Epistle of John gives just the same thing: “the word of life,” and life given in atonement, but the main subject is life. Christ gives life on the ground of forgiveness, and then comes the power of righteousness. Abraham walked with God in wonderful elevation of character; but the full question of righteousness had not been raised; it was not brought to light, because the way into the holiest was not yet made known. There was a righteousness which was owned, whilst he that sinned with a high hand was cut off. But there was not then the presence and power of the Spirit witnessing to, and acting in, eternal life, which could lead inside the veil, and give a new and accomplished righteousness, such as God has complacency in and could accept. All then was outside the veil, but there can be no outside now, for the veil is rent. I cannot stand before God now on the ground of the past. When the way of righteousness was not fully known, it was, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect.” The whole question of what man is had not been tried, nor was his utter inability and helplessness understood.

But it is a different thing now altogether, for it has been seen that man has not power to avail himself of the very remedy that could deliver him. Life is given to him, and righteousness has been wrought out for him, and grace gives the power of faith, which can lay hold of it. There

was the promised seed for Abraham—the true Isaac—which his faith could lay hold of. To us there is accomplishment, and not promise only. The law held out life on obedience; but it did not give power: indeed this was just what it did not. “If ye will obey, then ye shall be,” etc.; Exod. 19:5. The Israelites in their foolishness take upon themselves to work for that which had been unconditionally promised to the fathers, and immediately make the golden calf. The law is holy in its requirements, but it never pretends to give strength; so that the very need makes that which the law could do unavailable. It is like the Bethesda pool to the helpless man. If I am searching within to know if I have done what the law demands, I shall find not only that I am without power to meet its claims, but that the very link is broken on which I could have had the slightest hope of getting help through it. My heart can get no comfort until I see that there is power to be had in some other way, for I have no strength to keep the law, and consequently I have no hope of getting life and righteousness under its principles. And it is just when I come to this that I learn Christ is the only one who can meet my need, for in Him I have both the remedy and the power that can use it. If I am trying to resist evil, this cannot comfort me; but I have comfort in the knowledge that Christ has life and righteousness for me. Strength for my need is found in looking at an object outside myself. If I look within, I only see that which will distress, perplex, and condemn me; but if I look to Christ I get rest and peace, for He is both life and righteousness.

The more I know of Christ, the more I shall be judging myself, it is true—the more desiring to apprehend that

for which I am apprehended. But as there will be a knowledge of God's righteousness, so there will not be the going about to establish a righteousness of one's own, which must always raise the question as to its being my ground of standing before God. Christ is all I need, and the heart that is true to Him will not look at its own deeds of righteousness, but at Him who gives alike life and righteousness. In myself I see only sin, and evil, and all sorts of disorder. Now God requires holiness. Dare I look to what I am? No; but at Christ. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." The Lord Jesus Christ in passing through this world was the expression of perfect love and holiness. There was in Him all that law—nay, all that God—could demand.

Now what can I say for myself? Outward sins, in their gross form, may not trouble or distress me; but there is another thing: Have I communion with Christ? with God's righteousness? Is there in me constant unmingled love to God, as the one spring and motive of all my actions before Him? You know there is not. Self, alas! in its varied shapes is but too generally your object. Is it not? Self-pleasing, self-exalting, self-advancing, are ever the principles of men's actions—of men as they are. It is self-present or self-future with which he is occupied. In the blessed Lord there was the total absence of all selfishness; there was true devotedness of heart, and affection, and service, without the smallest particle of self-seeking. The believer gets the benefit of His holy walk and testimony, and his own selfishness is overcome by the grace he sees in Him.

The very thing man so much covets, there was the perfect absence of in Him. "I receive not honour from man." Now what is the spring, and stimulus, and motive

of almost every action? What is it that makes man—perhaps you—strive to be amiable, and pleasing, and agreeable? Is it not that you may “receive honour one of another”? And yet of such the word says, “I know you that ye have not the love of God in you.” Man’s acts begin and end in one continual effort to elevate self, instead of which there must be the death of self. It is no use to be striving to mend and improve self, for self must die. Death has to be written upon all the actions, and efforts, and motives of man: he must learn his entire helplessness, and the utter uselessness of every remedy; for his very need deprives him of the power of using the remedy. “There is no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool.”

We are a long time learning that there is no power in man— that the spirit of his nature and the very principles of his heart are but sin. Even when we are brought to this as regards the past, and have to own that as yet all has been evil, we do not give up the hope of being better in the future, and so acquire a righteousness this way. It comes to one thing. I failed as to yesterday, but I may improve for to-morrow. I have not reached this yet, that I must appear before God to-day, bad as I am—just as I am, in all my selfishness and sinfulness. We may be humble enough, too, in a way, and say, I am in a bad plight; but where there is a question of debt, there is always a talking about tomorrow. But this putting off until tomorrow will not make my position any better. I cannot appear in the presence of God without holiness; my conscience must be made clean. Where can I look for help? I do not desire that the holiness of God should be lessened; yet I have no power in myself to meet it. What is to become of me?

The Lord Jesus Christ said to the impotent man, who had an infirmity for thirty-and-eight years, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk.” It was God’s power, not man’s, and in the using of this power man gets the blessing. The grace of God puts the strength in him, “and immediately the man was made whole.” On Christ hangs all. He both provides the blessing and gives power to use it. He gives life. “The Son quickeneth whom he will.” From His own word we learn the wondrous truth, that He is become our life; for as we have partaken of the nature and fall of the first Adam, and got the sentence of death through him, so do we get life by Jesus Christ. Life is come down from heaven, and if I am resting in faith on this, it is mine. There may be self-judging, but my conscience will be at rest. I have seen this power of Christ on earth. “Take up thy bed and walk; and immediately the man was made whole.” There was no need of the pool, there was the life-giving presence of Christ. He had power to heal without the water. In Him was grace, strength, love, sympathy, and all the poor man could require. The helplessness of the man made him the very object for Christ to strengthen; his need was that which called forth the Lord’s help. This is the place in which He met us. “When we were yet without strength, Christ died for us.” He has made full atonement for sin. He “when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” We are “quickened together with him.” When I see Christ before God, I know that my sin is all put away, and that I have life in Him. I have life in the Son, and not in the creature. My sin is all gone, for Christ is up there at God’s right hand, and He has not got the sin with Him. If I am searching for life in myself, I must break off with Christ.

Eternal life is never said to be in us: we have it; but it is in Christ; and the standard is kept up in my soul by looking at Him; 2 Cor. 3:18. God has been perfectly glorified in the putting away of my sins; and I have got eternal life, for I have got the Son. If I have not the Son of God, I am yet in my sins. But the moment I see Christ risen and in heaven, I cannot but know that my sins are all gone, and I have life and righteousness; and He is the standard of both. “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 [or rather, judgment]; but is passed from death unto life.” It is written that we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Does this thought distress me? He “quickeneth whom he will.” Do you think He is going to judge those He has given life to? Is He going to judge Himself? No, the thought is monstrous. What power can be found to judge me?

Great confusion rises in the mind from mixing up “the resurrection of life” with “the resurrection of judgment.” Christ will execute judgment because “He is the Son of man.” Every knee shall bow before Him. He shall get glory from every creature. Is He going to judge what He has already glorified? We shall appear, we shall be manifested, before the judgment-seat of Christ, it is true; but it will be to receive from Him, for we shall be with Him in the glory before we get there. We are one with Him who is to judge. We shall have our glorified bodies then. “This mortal shall have put on immortality.” This vile body shall be changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body. It shall have what my soul has already got. Christ bore my sins, and is He going to judge what He has put away?

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life.” It is he that submits, “he that hears,” he that owns himself to be without strength, dead altogether as to hope or help from self. If I am brought into such a place before God as to listen to Christ and receive from Him, then have I life. “He that heareth my word shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life.” If my soul has bowed to Christ—if I have listened to Him—if I have learnt from Him, owning that I was lost—then have I a portion in life which settles every question of judgment. “He that heareth my word,” etc. This is the very way I have learnt that I am lost, and it has just come to this—I must either take my place with those who have the real life and shall not come into judgment, or with those who will be in the resurrection of judgment because they are rejecting Christ. I am a vile sinner, but I do believe the Father sent the Son; and this settles every question of my guilt. Am I mixing up the resurrection of life with that of judgment, so that the thought of judgment is still distressing me? God has committed all judgment unto the Son. Will He judge what He has quickened into life? Most assuredly He will not. Shall I find some other God to judge me? The thought would be blasphemy. The word is particularly clear: but we, in confusing the two, lose the comfort of their meaning.

“They that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment,” v. 29. Well, if we have heard His word, and believed on Him that sent Christ, we have eternal life. “You hath he quickened who were dead.” We have that perfect blessed holiness that can stand before God.

Believing on Him, I have got a life in which I have the blessed certainty that I shall not come into judgment. I have already eternal life and I have passed from death unto life. I was dead, but I am raised, as to my soul, by the power of God. I have got Christ. He has made me whole. He has given me both life and righteousness. As regards my present position, I am emptied out of myself into Him. He redeemed me. He died for me. There is a judgment, sure and inevitable for man; but it is altogether outside this eternal life. I must be in the one place or the other, either raised in the resurrection of life, or in that of judgment. I cannot have a portion in both. This vile body shall be changed like unto His glorious body. The full power of life will then be upon my body, as it is now in my soul. God must vindicate His holiness. This He did upon the cross; but the cross, while it shewed out, did not procure His love. Who sent the Son? Sin was put away by putting God's Son in the sinner's place; but His love was not created by the cross. His holiness was vindicated therein, but we make a great mistake if we suppose His love commenced at the cross. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." And we have life in Him. He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree." It is no question of what I shall be to-morrow, but of what I am, or rather what Christ is to me to-day. May the Lord give us to be humble, remembering the love that made Him sin who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him!

The Presence Of The Spirit In John 14

Compared With Chapters 15 and 16

There are three things quite distinct from each other—conscience, life, and power.

There may be conviction of conscience, as in Herod when he heard John preach; but he was not converted. A man may know he is doing wrong, but this does not give him power against it.

Life, a new spiritual being, is another thing. It gives activity to the conscience. A new nature is there with its feelings, desires, affections, but without power. There will be less peace perhaps than before there was life, because there may have been false peace before. The state is, of course, better than that of the mere natural man: there will be no levity in that state.

The third thing alluded to is the power of the Spirit of God. We must distinguish between gift for service, and the power which gives enjoyment. There will be peace. In order to our having the power, Christ has made peace through the blood of His cross. “There is, therefore, no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” We want this power. It could not be conferred on man in the flesh. Divine righteousness must be there, or God could not put His seal on man. Can God put His seal on a person full of the sense of sin?—in conflict about his sin—say such a state as Peter’s, when he said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”? There may be good desires and tenderness of conscience, but it will run into legality, because not as yet resting in the favour of God. These experiences may be all very useful in their place,

but they are not peace. We have peace made by the blood of the cross, and divine righteousness wrought out in Christ. I can now look up to God without hiding my sin. The way I come at the sense of the immensity of sin is by the immensity of the grace that has met it.

The reality of the presence of the Holy Ghost, who has come down, and dwells in us, is most important. The Holy Ghost is given as a seal. Christ said, “If I go away, I will send him unto you.” The Comforter brings to me the fulness of His grace, being the witness of accepted righteousness to our hearts. He convicts, or demonstrates, of righteousness, and this righteousness is mine. I stand in it. He convicts the world of sin, of unbelief; but the demonstration to me is of righteousness—righteousness wrought out for me, which God has accepted. Now He is perfectly free to bless.

My thought now is not, I am so full of sin that He cannot bless me; but, God has accepted the righteousness and I stand in it. We are of God, and Christ is made unto us righteousness. We are born of God, and as such we need something to bring to Him. It is all furnished in Christ. There is not only peace as to the past, but I have Christ’s standing in the presence of God. We stand in Christ, the second Man, and have the second Man’s place in virtue of redemption. So sure as I have the first Adam’s place as turned out because a sinner, so I have the last Adam’s place according to the counsels of God in Christ.

At the end of John 17 we have Christ’s righteousness title (v. 22) and His personal title (v. 24), spoken of. He is bound to bless. “I am glorified in them.” He could not

bless sin, but now righteousness being perfected, all the purposes of His heart in love can flow out to us, because we are the righteous ones. Whatever the love of God— the righteousness of God— all that by which He stands in the presence of God, because of His work and Person, we have, and are blessed in virtue of it.

The Spirit is the seal and the earnest—the Spirit of holiness —the Spirit of adoption—the Spirit of truth. All that God can give we are made possessors of by the Holy Ghost, and our "bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost." How do I know Christ is in the Father and myself in Christ? The Holy Ghost has come down, and as Christ said in chapter 14, "In that day," referring to the present time, "ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." As many as are led by the Spirit are the sons of God." "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." He makes us the servants of Christ, and all is founded on the work of Christ, but realised by the presence of the Holy Ghost. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you." He tells them that all they had before, it was a good thing for them to lose, because we have got more by the Holy Ghost being given. Christ's humiliation, did they understand? "That be far from thee, Lord." Would a Christian say this now? They could not think what it could mean, that He should die and rise again.

Christ is the object, and the Father's love too is, but the Holy Ghost is the power by which I see Christ and realise the Father's love. Christ being gone, and there being nothing visible, my affections are more drawn out and exercised; and this is blessed. He does not say, Blessed are they that have seen and believed, but, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have

believed.” Divine affection for Christ is much more drawn out by Christ being absent, and yet we long to see Him. That part is true too. While we are going through a world always so luring us to forget this blessed One, the Holy Ghost is in us to keep Him the object dear to our hearts.

There are three ways in which the Holy Ghost is spoken of in these three chapters. In chapter 15 Christ is (v. 26) the One who sends; in chapter 14 the Father (v. 26) sends; in chapter 16 He is come as a Person on earth. The difference between chapters 14 and 15 it is important to notice. In Acts 2:33, where the Holy Ghost is given at Pentecost, there was power acting on them. “He hath shed forth this,” etc. That was not all, but very blessed. Christ was to baptise with the Holy Ghost, not with water. And this was fulfilled. Power was given, and this was needed to go through a world of wickedness and unbelief. If you have only to be faithful in witnessing for the Lord one day, you want power/or you would be like Peter in the judgment hall, cursing and swearing. “Ye shall do greater things than these, because I go to the Father,” chap. 14:12. He bestowed these gifts. When Christ is spoken of as giving the Holy Ghost, it is always for service, witnessing for Him; and when this is the subject, reward is spoken of in other places, and the appearing and manifestation of Christ are connected with it.

God said to Christ, “Sit on my right hand till I make,” etc. (Acts 2). The Holy Ghost acts in power till Christ comes in power. Everything will be displayed when He comes in His kingdom. Everything will then be set right j crowns given, etc. Christ is exalted on the right hand of

the Father, and received the Holy Ghost afresh as Head of His body, and thence sent Him forth.

This is not the same as chapter 14. True, every word would fall dead; we should have no right word to speak, if the Holy Ghost did not give the thoughts, words, etc. This is all connected with service; but our proper portion we get in chapter 14. There is the very outstreaming of the Father's love. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." He will not leave you as I must. I cannot stay with you. I am about to work the redemption and am going up on high; but He will come, not merely to make apostles and give power for service, but to remain with you.

It is He who now gives me the consciousness of God's loving me as He loves Jesus. I have more or less joy, but it never leaves me. I have "the love of God shed abroad in my heart." How do I know God is love? I have it in me. The proof is that He "sent His Son the propitiation for our sins." This is what the conscience wants; but as to the enjoyment of it, I have it, because God dwelleth in me and I in God. "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another," etc. It is proved in the word that God is love, by what He has done, and you have it in your hearts. Christ said," I have declared thy name unto them (the men which thou hast given me out of the world), and will declare it." I have the relationship; I have the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father. I have the consciousness of being in the same relationship as Christ Himself is. "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father" —I have and know the blessedness of His Person; no one could be in the Father who was not God: He was God—"and ye in me and I in you." The reality of

that I know by the Comforter dwelling in me. Then I have done with myself. When I think of my blessing, I think of Christ—a deliverance from self. That is our place in Christ, and we are conscious of it too, because the same Spirit who is in Him is in me as a believer.

The Holy Ghost, while He is the Spirit of power, is, then, He who gives me the consciousness of my blessing. This is not merely union with Christ, but Christ in us. “I in you.” All the blessedness in Him is in us. What is in me? Christ is in me. “Because I live,” He says, “ye shall live also” All that He has is mine. This has a threefold bearing on our hearts. There is the dwelling in the consciousness of God’s love in my soul. Then I look back and feed on the humbled Christ. What love in Him! What divine perfectness! What a thing to feed upon! There are streams in the saints, but there was the thing itself. Divine love was moving through this world. “I am the living bread come down from heaven.” “Do this in remembrance of me.” I remember, because it is past, as to fact; not as to my affections, but as to the fact. “He that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” There is everything in Christ which the heart of man can assimilate.

There there is another thing. I am to be in the same glory with Him. What can I ask Him for more? He is God, and He must make us as happy as Himself. He says, “My peace I give unto you.” Not something like it, but the thing itself— “my peace.” Thus meanwhile He fills one’s heart with the joy we are to have by-and-by. In chapter 14 there is nothing about being heirs and joint-heirs—the place in glory, but all as children are to be where He is. “If I go away, I will come again … that where I am there ye may be also.” It is not here reward

for service when He comes, that is spoken of, but to be received to Himself. If we have found delight in Him here, we are going to be with Him for ever. “If it were not so, I would have told you.” This world is not good enough for them, though He has manifested His grace here. He gives the assurance of His coming again to associate their hearts with the Father’s love.

If His love is not filling my heart, I shall go to some vanity in a shop to satisfy me: my heart will get into my business. If my spirit is wrapped up in the love of Christ, there will be rivers of water flowing out. There is no effort in shewing forth the love of God, if my soul is dwelling in it. If I am weak, and try to lift up this table, I make a great effort; if I am strong, it needs no effort. So, if there is power through love dwelling in us, there is no effort. If I am not in communion, it is for the Holy Ghost to speak to my conscience, instead of using me. If I get knowledge merely to communicate it, I shall be as dry as a mill-stone. When we enjoy Him for His own sake, it flows forth to others. So as to His coming again.

The Holy Ghost is come, and, associating our hearts with Himself, takes us up victorious. As He has overcome the world, so have we. The victory is gained; and the way we enjoy the victory now is by the Holy Ghost taking of these things and associating our hearts with Him on high. The Holy Ghost associates our hearts with the Christ to whom we are united. This makes the heart perfectly free.

What a blessed thing that there is this living power of the Holy Ghost for the saints; and in this poor, tried, and oppressed world to be able to bring in streams of God’s

love! This can only be as the Holy Ghost is the witness in us, and as He associates us with the perfect love of God.

As Is The Heavenly

1 Corinthians 15:48

There are two great things that the Scriptures present to us as effectual for salvation. One is the full vindicating of God's moral character in grace toward us, which the atonement does. There is righteousness in God against sin, and there is love to the sinner—for God's character is not only vindicated in the atonement, but He is glorified in it.

But, besides this, there is another and a distinct thing, and this is the coming in of power to bring us out of all the misery and wretchedness which are the effects of sin, and to set us in a new place. Both these things form a part of the great salvation. The one was absolutely necessary, if sinners were to be reconciled to God at all; for the atonement must have been made in order to our being brought near to God. If God had brought us to Himself without His righteousness having been perfectly vindicated, He could not have been the holy and blessed One that He is. But all that God is has been perfectly vindicated on the cross, which without the cross never could have been. If God had let every one off in mercy, this would not have been love; it would have been indifference to sin. If one of my children, for instance, were to be naughty, and yet I were to persist in treating him all the same as the others, this would not be love. You cannot have true love unless there is a perfect maintaining of righteousness according to the truth of God's name. But to maintain this must, necessarily, have shut out all sinners without the cross— without the death of Christ, as giving Himself up to the perfect

righteousness of God, His judgment, His hatred of sin, His authority (for it is a question of authority, as well as of holiness) and, at the same time, of perfect love to the sinner.

And this is what the cross of Christ is for us, the full bringing out and vindicating of all that God is, not only in love but in holiness. It is full of blessing. We come to God as needy sinners, and we find there the mercy-seat, and His precious blood sprinkled upon it. But when in peace I can reflect upon the cross, I see how perfectly God is glorified in it.

The more it shews me the holiness of God, the more also what a wonderful thing the cross was; there is nothing like it in heaven or earth, excepting of course God Himself. No creation, nothing that has ever been seen in this world, could be what the cross was. Creation may shew God’s power, but it cannot bring out God’s love and truth as the cross does; and therefore it remains everlastingly the wonderful and blessed place of learning, what could be learnt nowhere else, of all that God is.

But while this is true, there is another thing, the coming in of a Deliverer to take us out of the condition in which we were by nature—for so indeed we were—poor, wretched creatures struggling in the ditch, and no way of getting out of it. Supposing then that God had been vindicated and glorified by the cross of Christ, it did not follow that you and I should therefore be brought out of the condition in which we were. This required that God should come down to us, and take us out of all the condition of sin. and misery, and put us in another

condition altogether, and this needs the coming in of divine power.

Salvation is a deliverance wrought by divine power, so as to bring us out of one condition into another. It is true we are morally changed, but we want more than that—though whoever has got that will surely have all the rest. But supposing I have the new nature, with its desires after holiness, what is the effect? It gives me the consciousness of all the sin that is in me. I want to be righteous, but then I see that I am not righteous; and I bow under the power of sin and of the knowledge of such holiness which I have learnt to desire, only to find out that I have not got it. I say what is the good of my knowing holiness in this way, if I have not got it? It is no comfort to me. Here we have been speaking of God's righteousness; but when I look, I find I have no righteousness.

Where can I find a resting-place for my spirit in such a state as this? It is impossible; and the very effect of having this new nature, with all its holy affections and desires after Christ, brings me to the discovery of the lack of what this new nature cannot of itself impart. I have got the cravings of the new nature—all its holy and righteous desires; but the thing craved for I have not got. It is the desire of my nature. I say, Oh that I could be righteous; but then I am not righteous. In that way God meets us with a positive salvation. He meets us and quickens us into the desire and want of holiness, giving us a nature capable of enjoying it when we get it.

But this is not all. When I have got that nature, have I got the thing I want? No. I strive, and think, Oh! if I could get more of this holiness, but still I have not got it.

I may hate the sin, but the sin is there that I hate. I may long to be with God, to be for ever in the light of His countenance, but then I see that I have got sin, and know that the light of His countenance cannot shine upon my sin; I want a righteousness fit for His presence, and I have not got it. It is thus God meets us in the cross. He not only gives the nature that we want, but He gives us the thing that we want. And not only so, but in Christ He gives us both the perfect object and the nature, and this in power.

We get, in the expression of this, a remarkable thing in the chapter: “As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” It is not here what we shall be in point of glory, for afterwards he adds, “And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” We have borne the image of the first Adam, in all the consequences of his sin and ruin, and we shall bear the image of the second Adam. But He lays down first this great truth for our hearts, “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” It is what we are now. There I find what my heart, as quickened of God, wants; and I learn what blessedness is in Christ, by whom God has revealed it to us. He has given us a righteousness in Christ, who is the blessed accepted man in the presence of God, of whom alone God could say, “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” You have been rejected by man, but You are just my delight. “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” It is that which God brings before us. He puts us into a new condition before Himself, and then makes us judge all that is inconsistent with it. Then, besides this, power is given—not a new

nature merely, with cravings after a position which we have not got, but power to judge practically, from a position which we have got, all that is inconsistent with it. There will be that which has to be judged, but I shall judge it in the consciousness of what God has given me in Christ. It is there that I get the measure of what God, come in in power, has made me.

“As is the earthy, … as is the heavenly,” etc. Here are these two men, so to speak. There is the first Adam, of the earth, with those that pertain to him, earthy; and there is the second Man, the Lord from heaven. There are these two Adams, and I get in both the pattern and model of all other men that are after their image. I see the first Adam, fallen, wretched, and corrupt; then I see the other Adam that becomes in a spiritual sense the head of a race after He has taken that place in God’s counsels in glory.

I say, There is the pattern, and model, and head of that race. It is not merely a truth that the atonement has been made for us, in respect of what we were as belonging to the first Adam; but God has been glorified in respect of our sins. The more we get into the presence of God, the more we shall learn the value of the cross. But then this chapter, in speaking of the resurrection, speaks of the coming in of power. We just see how the Lord first deals with Christ in power of resurrection, and then, at the same time, how we are objects of this very thing.

Now what I see first in Christ, as He was upon earth, is perfect grace in His dealings with men—nothing but goodness meeting them in all their need. The heart gets cheered and encouraged by that. He feeds them when

hungry, heals them when sick, and casts out devils. There was power too, but not in those with whom He had to do. It was divine power, which ministered to their wants. It was the wretchedness and misery in which man was, to which the goodness of God in Christ was applied, and the only thing in the person was the sin and misery to which the goodness was applied. I have felt latterly that, the more we get at the facts of the Lord's life on earth, the more power there will be. We do not sufficiently present facts, but we reason upon the value of the facts. I am persuaded the more the facts of the gospel are presented to people's souls, the more power there will be.

Looking then at Christ upon earth, I find God in this lowly man. Let me get firmly hold of that simple fact, in a world of misery and wretchedness and toil; God has come into it and I have found Him. I have met Him. It is by faith, of course; but still God was there, and I have met Him. I know what He is and what He is for me. I was a sinner like all the rest of the world, but God was there and He was all goodness to me. I have found Him and I know what He is, because He has been it to me. Christ was upon earth, coming down to all my need, and I have met God in Him and I know Him.

Now I say, this is in one sense everything to my soul. You may reason as to what He will be in the day of judgment; but I say I have found Him and know what He is, and it is perfect goodness. I was a vile, wretched creature, troubling myself about nothing but pleasure or worse; but I met Him and know what He is. When the soul has got this, it has got a key that opens every lock in eternity. I have found God and I have found that He is perfect light. Of course, just because He is light, I may

see failures in myself, I may be ashamed of myself; but still I know what He is and what He is to me, and thus my soul gets a resting-place and a divine acquaintance with the God I have to do with. I see that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” He has been here with me on earth; but now I have another trouble—that I am not fit to be with Him in heaven. Why here is death, here is sin, here is failure to be dealt with; and sin cannot go to heaven. Therefore I get another fact: I find that this blessed One, who is the expression of this perfect grace that I did not think anything about—I find Him coming down into my condition, made sin for me, going under the death and under the judgment that were due to me, and bearing my sins.

I find Christ now not merely as a living Christ upon earth, kind toward my miseries, shewing all goodness to me, but as taking my place under the suffering of the wrath and judgment of God, and there I find Him altogether alone. Christ may suffer in a way in which I may suffer with Him. He may suffer from man, and we may suffer thus in our little measure. He may learn what suffering is in this world in order to comfort me and suffer with me. But when I find the Lord suffering on the cross, there I find Him absolutely and entirely alone, and there I find the great question of sin perfectly and for ever settled between God and me. But I was not there at all, I could not be where He was, for He was there just that I might never be there, bearing the wrath of God and drinking that cup of suffering of which, if I had tasted the least drop, it would have been everlasting death. Well, I see the Lord coming down to this place of my deepest misery, and now the power of God comes in there. He has taken my place in grace. Where sin had

brought me, grace brought Him. There into that place of death and wrath He came, and now I see power coming in.

Atonement has been made, and where He perfectly glorified God, the power of God comes in and sets Him at His own right hand in heaven. So that I do not merely get God glorified in the cross of Christ, but I see the power of God coming in and taking that very Christ when He was down in the depths of death and setting Him at His own right hand in heaven. Here then I have found a positive actual deliverance; and so truly was this the case that Christ can celebrate the name of God in association with others. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.” He can celebrate that name, knowing it after all which He Himself has gone through for us, bringing Him into the presence of God His Father in all the full blessedness of the light of His countenance, after He had taken all the full weight of sin upon Him. But power had come in, as is said in Psalm 16, “Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption,” and He did not see corruption. True He had had there to say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” but even He trusts Himself to God His Father, and God puts His seal upon Him by raising Him from the dead. There I get in the resurrection of Christ the coming in of divine power, in the very place where we were lying in ruin and helplessness, and where Christ was in grace for us; and it takes Him entirely out of it.

Now I have got the Man Christ Jesus in heaven after atonement has been made, and after the question of sin has been settled in virtue of His having glorified God about it. I get Him in the place of power as the object of

God's counsels. For it is in Christ that all things are to be gathered together in one, and even now God has set Him Head over all things to the church.

The whole question of sin is thus settled in the resurrection of Christ. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. But now is Christ risen from the dead"; and we are not in our sins. There I find the heavenly Man that has been down here and borne my sins, in power of resurrection in the presence of God. He is "the Lord from heaven" too. Mark this. Afterwards the apostle says in Ephesians, that the very same power that wrought in Christ, when God raised Him from the dead, is exercised in every one that believes. He desires that they may know "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 and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places." Exactly the same power that wrought when God took Christ from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand, has already wrought in you that believe, and you have got a place with Him there; and therefore, "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy, and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly."

We are in Christ in the presence of God; and now I get not desires only but the answer to them. I have now not merely a new nature, but that which the new nature wants, because I have found Christ. I have got not merely cravings after something, but the thing I crave. I want righteousness and holiness, and this is what I have got, because I am in Christ. I want to be without fear in the presence of God, and I am in it, because I am in Christ. I have got now, in a word, full salvation—not

merely a new nature but salvation. God has come down to me and He has saved me. He has come and by His own power has taken me out of the place in which I was lying in misery and helplessness in the first Adam, and has put me in the place of the second Adam before Himself without a sin upon me—all sin put away, because all was judged in the Person of Christ.

Such is the condition into which Christ has thus brought us. After the fall of the first man, after the thorough trial of man as man—tried without law—tried under law, then God comes in with perfect grace and sends His well-beloved Son. So to speak, He says, That is the last thing I can try man by; but when they saw Him they said, "This is the heir; some, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." Man as the first man has been perfectly tried, and has been found wanting: no means can mend him. But what do I find in Christ? He has taken the place of the first Adam down here for us. He has died in it, and there is a total end of the whole state for those that believe. Now I reckon myself dead to sin, because Christ has died. He was treated as being in that place and He died, and the whole thing is ended—ended for me under judgment of another's bearing. As a believer I shall still feel the workings of the old nature and have to judge it; but I see Christ taking it for me, and judgment is executed upon it in His Person on the cross, and now He is out of it all, alive again for evermore. That life is wholly gone in which He laid it down, and the old nature to which sin and judgment applied is gone—just as a man who may be in prison, awaiting there the punishment of his crime, and he dies; the life to which the punishment is attached is gone.

It is impossible that there can be any longer a question of punishment for the sin: the life is gone to which the sin and its punishment attached. Just so was it with Christ; and therefore the apostle always addresses the believer as dead to sin. “Ye are dead,” he says to him; you are not a living man at all. “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

It is never said in Scripture that we are to die to sin, for if this were said, it would be ourselves that would die, and this would be an end of us altogether. But what is stated in Scripture is, that we are dead to sin through Jesus Christ. Now that Christ has died unto sin once for me, let me reckon myself to be dead to sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

This is what I get as the principle of the Christian’s place; that while as a fact he is alive, yet as Christ has died, the very nature that God dealt with as to the question of sin, in the first Adam, is done with; and now a power has come in that has made me alive with Christ. The very nature that had to be dealt with is looked at as a judged and dead thing, and I am brought into the position of Christ as risen and in the presence of God. When we sit with Him, we shall be like Him, but as to our real condition before God, even now we are sitting in heavenly places in Christ. Divine love has reached down to the place of sin and death in which we were, and divine righteousness has taken us up and set us in the place of light, where Christ is; for there is no middle place.

If I know what sin is, I see that it deserves condemnation. It would not be mercy to leave the sin

alone and pass it by. It must be put away; but how? It must be put away by death, because its merits are condemnation. If God is dealing with sin, looked at in my relationship to Him as a sinner, He must deal with it in death.

There is no forgiveness for the sinner, looked at as guilty before God, without that real work which deals with it according to God's nature; and it was dealt with thus in the cross. He has appeared once to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. But this is not all. Having thus put away sin, He has done with the old thing altogether, and has got into a new one, that very nature left behind in which He was responsible and suffered for sin, and now He is the heavenly Man in the presence of God; and there we are set in Him. "As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." Therefore it is that in the Epistle of John we get the same truth brought out.

First of all we have there (chap. 4:9) that "the love of God was manifested toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." There I see divine love that visited this world in the Person of the Son of God. There were two things that were needed. That He should be the propitiation for our sins, because we were guilty, was one; but, besides that, he goes on to say, "Herein is love with us made perfect," etc. There is the perfectness of love. Not merely has God's love visited us in this world, in all our need and sorrow, to love us there, but herein is the love of God "with us made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world."

How can I have boldness in the day of judgment? Why, I am the same as my Judge, and in this world too: “As he is, so are we in this world.” Just what I get here, “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” It is the same truth. What a thing that is! What a salvation! It is not merely mercy that forgives sin; it is a real perfect salvation, a deliverance which has taken us, as in Christ, out of the condition in which we were, and has put us into another; and that other is Christ.

It is true that we shall all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ: everything must be brought out there. But even so, why, I am like Himself! What is He going to judge? How do I get there at all? Because Christ has come and fetched me. I am going, He said to His disciples, “to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where 1 am, there ye may be also.” So that when I come to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, it is because Christ has so loved me that He has come to fetch me there; and in what condition? I am in glory before I get to the judgment-seat. Everything will there be brought out, and with immense profit and gain to us. We shall know right and wrong then as we are known. We shall be manifested, but manifested before Him who is in the presence of God as the warrant of our salvation. We shall not thoroughly bear the image of Christ till the time of glory. But even now, as to our standing before God, “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.”

Now, as regards my soul and eternal life, He has come and brought us into this condition, making Christ to be my life, and in Christ my righteousness and life. He has brought me in, in faith and in the truth of my new

nature, into this wondrous place in Christ. The realisation of it is another thing, and may be hindered through failure or infirmity. You begin to search, perhaps in yourself, and find such and such a thought contrary to Christ. But I say, That is the old man. If you take yourself by yourself, there is not righteousness for God, and therefore you cannot stand an instant in God's sight. I must look at Christ to see what I am, and I say, "As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly"; and this is what I am in the presence of God. There is no veil: we are to walk in the light, as God is in the light.

Now, the measure of the judgment of the working of my flesh, and of everything else, is according to this love and grace. The moment I have got Christ, and I can say, I know a man in Christ (and so thoroughly was this the case with Paul that he could say, "I know a man in Christ, whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell"—he is not thinking of himself at all), then everything is judged according to what I am in Christ. It is not there I glory of Paul. Paul knew what infirmities and distresses, etc., were. But "I know a man in Christ," and I am glad of such an one to glory in. I will glory with all my heart in it (because he is not looking at himself and at his righteousness), "yet of myself," Paul says, "I will not glory, but in mine infirmities." Here I get to the true reality of what my condition is as a poor feeble creature down here below. But then God has put me in Christ; and now whatever passes in my mind must be judged according to Him. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." I may come short, but this is the only measure.

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul takes this very ground. "I will glory," he says, "in my infirmities, that the power of

Christ may rest upon me." It is not that he was always in the third heaven, or that we shall be in the full enjoyment always of our position. But this is true, that the Christ in whom we are is in heaven. He is not here, He is in the presence of God, and we are in Him there; and even though we do not realise always our place in Christ, yet I say that Christ is never inconsistent with what He is in that presence, and Christ dwells in me; and this is where I get the perfect rule of life that I need. The power of Christ dwells in me even upon earth. If Christ walked upon earth, His walk was perfectly consistent with a heavenly Man. I find Him to be the perfect expression of the love and grace and holiness that was in the Father.

It is true Paul says, "I know a man in Christ," etc. But does this man mean that the Christ he had then was a different Christ from the one he had known in the third heaven? No; he had got the very power that was suited to a Christ in heaven. We get the principle of all holiness of walk from the fact of our position being in Christ. I must know that this is my place before God, if my walk is to be according to Christ. "For their sakes," said our blessed Lord, "I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth." He is set apart to God as the pattern Man in heavenly places, that the Holy Ghost may take and apply it to us here. I see this perfect Christ set apart for me in heaven, and I say I must walk according to that pattern. I will walk in love, because Christ also hath loved us, and given Himself for us. I get there, "Be ye imitators of God." And in another place, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." He sets before us, as walking through this world, the kindness of God even to His

enemies. The starting-point of all my measure of conduct is the place in which I am already set in Christ.

Since the fall of man, since our judgment has been a fallen one by sin, our thought of obligation and duty is always as a means of gaining something. People often fancy that, if there is not the uncertainty attendant upon this responsibility to get life, there must be carelessness. But supposing you have got children, they are your children, and they never can cease to be your children. But does that destroy their responsibility? Their relationship to you is the very thing that forms their responsibility. The principle of human responsibility till sin came into the world was a blessed one. It was this—I am to act up to the condition that I am in. The Christian responsibility is not that of a man hoping and trying to be a Christian. It is not at the time of the difficulty and danger that we get the capacity of walking according to Christ. The way to walk in a time of difficulty is by valuing Christ not because of the temptation but for His own sake. If we live in the constant valuing of Christ for His own sake, we shall assuredly have His delivering us from the temptation. If my heart is full of Christ, the things that are contrary to Him do not attract me. I may feel my failure and weakness all the more, but the God that by power has brought us into this place in Christ can sustain us in it. The whole of our relationship with God upon the ground of the old man is closed in the cross; and then in a risen Christ all is begun afresh in perfect blessing in the power of the deliverance in which we have been brought in Christ. The place in which we are thus set begins with the cross where I see my old nature judged and set aside; and therefore it is that the apostle can say such a

thing as “when we were in the flesh.” There are multitudes even of true believers who say, What are we but in the flesh now? But the apostle says, “When we were in the flesh,” evidently implying that we are not in the flesh now. It is what we were in the first Adam. The standard of our walk gets its real power and blessedness when once we see that we are no longer in the flesh, but are set in Christ before God. The government of God comes in, and this is another thing; but we are brought into that blessed place in the light in the perfectness of the grace which has brought us there. We ought to be able to come, our hearts set at large by God, and, as we deal even with the world, to say, What we have to talk to you about is a salvation that we have got: I have found God, and I am come to tell you of a salvation that I have got through the delivering power of God.

“We Have This Treasure”

2 Corinthians 4:7

It is wonderful the liberty the Holy Ghost gives in the soul. Not that we have no conflict—we have; but we have to maintain it in the power of the Holy Ghost. We possess this treasure, and we have delight in it. We not only know that we are safe, but we enjoy it. It was the desire of the apostle to be in full possession of what he now knew by faith, but was not fully brought into the possession of. He had the treasure, but not in glory. Therefore he says, “we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” He was not groaning because of the weariness of the way, the trials and difficulties here; but he had such a consciousness of the blessedness of the treasure, that he groaned to possess it unhinderedly in the presence of God.

It is good to have the joy now; but there is always a tendency to confidence in the flesh. The spring of all this liberty, and joy, and blessing, is that we have seen Christ, we have seen Him in glory. The eye of faith has rested on Him. We could not have this joy without the certainty of redemption accomplished, which we have in the Man Christ Jesus, being accepted in glory. The sufferings of Christ touch the affections, but do not give this joy. An attachment is formed for God, and we would not go to another; but this is not all He gives us. We must be able to say, I have got redemption—all my sin is gone—all that was against me is taken away through the One who died and is received into glory, in order to have this joy and longing for the glory as the result. It is all

contrary to the life of the flesh. Where the life of the flesh ends, the life of the Spirit begins, and practically we have power in the life of the Spirit in proportion as the flesh is dead. Christ before the soul is the key to these chapters and those that precede.

In chapter 1 he says, “We had the sentence of death in ourselves”—no trust in natural life. All that was of the first Adam gone, dead, and therefore nothing would touch the ground of his confidence “in God which raiseth the dead.” That confidence clearly sets aside the fear of things around. If holding oneself dead to the law and to Satan; what power has he over a dead man? The principle of power is that we are dead. Faith acts on this.

So in verse 5, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord:... 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.” Then he says, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.” What treasure? Christ. Paul has seen the One who has put away his sin—who is his righteousness—who is in glory. He sees Him, and he says, That is what I want. In seeing Him I see One who has the power of life, who has passed through death, and overcome it. I have this One—Christ. He is the treasure. I have it in an earthen vessel; still I have it. John says, “The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life,” etc. There is Christ, the eternal life. I have Him in that glory known to faith. I shall have this life, the full fruit of eternal redemption in glory. Abraham believed that God was able to perform; but we believe that God the Father

raised Christ from the dead. It is done, and His being there in glory is the proof that all is done.

Our standing on high in the presence of God is the fruit of the work being finished. He has appeared once “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” He has brought me to God. Has He brought me in my sins? No. I should not be there at all if not cleansed. “He was made sin for us.” “He hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” There is the resting place of the soul. Then, in this chapter, He (Christ) is presented as the power of life. I have the treasure in “an earthen vessel.” It is a vessel that hinders, for it is eanhen; but the faith that sees the treasure has put us in possession of life. If I have life, it is because I have Christ. “He that hath the Son hath life.” “In him was life.” “He is our life,” and “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.”

Another view of it is Christ, the life down here. When I look at Him down here, I can say, There is my life. If I look at myself, I see the life mixed up with much that ought not to be; but when I look at Jesus, what obedience, what patience, what graciousness! and I say, This is my life! I can bless God for giving me such a life. He was perfect in everything. What rest it gives to the spirit to be able to say in beholding all that perfection in Him, That is mine!

But now, when I think of power, I must look up to Christ in glory for it. If this earthly tabernacle were dissolved, “we have a building of God,” etc. The essence of the character of life is Christ in glory. In Romans 1 He is declared to be “the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the

dead." The principle of the power was seen in His being raised from the dead. We have a title in Him to say always, that we are dead. Therefore it is "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." When we come to live practically in this way, it is always "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." We cannot manifest the life of Christ practically, but as we are reckoning ourselves dead. If I walk by faith, I am bearing about in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus. If I walk by sight, Christ is not my object or my power. "We are delivered unto death," chap. 4:11. Sometimes it is necessary we should pass through trouble to break down the flesh, which cannot live by faith. Paul had to go through trial, but through it all he was beholding by faith the treasure. "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." There is the full revelation of Christ, known to faith, and the certainty that when I see Him I shall be like Him. He is my righteousness now, and when I see Him in glory, I shall be like Him, and this I groan for and earnestly desire.

Does not His love refresh my spirit now?—does not His love restore my soul (happier not so to need it)? There is no cloud, no fear of judgment, but certainty of being clothed, and therefore there is the earnest desire to be clothed upon with the house which is from heaven. So strong was the desire for this, that he did not even think of dying—" not for that we would be unclothed," etc.

What is the secret of this? He had not only seen life in Christ, but Christ Himself, and he saw that the life could cause that "mortality should be swallowed up of life." He had faith in that power of life in Christ that it could effect this—death would slip away and not be. Do you

believe in this power of life? As long as there is a soul to gather in, His long-suffering continues, but the power exists. Then the apostle goes on to speak of dying. What can death do? If I die before Christ comes, I am in His presence. I shall only depart from this mortal body to be with Him. “Therefore we are always confident… Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be agreeable to him. For we must all appear [or be manifested] before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

How are we all to be manifested? All will give an account of themselves (the saints when they are caught up to be with the Lord, the wicked at the end of the millennium). The saints give account of themselves in glory. What is there to be judged in the saint? He is identified with the very principle that will judge, if he is the righteousness of God. What was there to judge? Conscience is not awakened by it at all for the believer, for that is purged; but it does awaken something. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” There is not only righteousness, but love. He sees the terror of judgment; the sight of the righteousness that judges is the occasion why he sets about preaching to others. It puts love in activity, and then he adds another thing: “We are manifest unto God,” not “we shall be.” I stand in the presence of the glory now, and whatever does not suit that glory is judged now. It acts on the conscience in the way of self-judgment. We want this light, but we must have perfect confidence in God, for there can be no happy play of the affections if there is not this confidence. We cannot have fellowship with a person, if we think he is going to condemn us; but “our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” We cannot have confidence if we have not a

perfect conscience; Heb. 9:9. This we have by Christ our righteousness, He having obtained eternal redemption for us. What there is a memorial of now in God's presence is, that my sins are put away by that one perfect sacrifice. I have a righteousness perfect, and so infinite that I can never get out of it. Christ is the centre of everything for the heart. When I think of the exceeding and eternal weight of glory, it may seem too much for me; but when I see the Lamb there, as the light thereof, it puts my affections in play. It is the Lamb that was slain for me—the Lamb that took away my sins.

There is grace needed every day for our passing through the wilderness, yet not for us to rise up to righteousness, as if we had it not, but to walk according to it. Christ takes knowledge of our wants. Thus there are two parts of His present blessing for us; Himself the object for our affections, and His constant supply for our daily need. We have the righteousness, and we wait for the hope of it, the glorious hope which is suitable to the righteousness of God. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

The Way Of A Christian’s Power

2 Corinthians 12

This chapter presents to us, in a remarkable manner, the way in which the power comes whereby a Christian can walk through this world. It is not merely now a path in which he can walk, but the way by which he may have strength to walk in it, and what the perfect work of God is in order to his walking in this path. Here we see the two extremes of what a Christian can rise to, and into what he can fall.

In the beginning of the chapter a man was caught up to the third heaven; he was in the highest extreme of spiritual blessedness. Such blessedness indeed he had been conscious of, that it was not suited to speak of when he got back into his natural state. No doubt his faith was strengthened by it for his work, but he could not speak of such things. Now there is the highest state of spirituality which you can suppose, and yet it is that which is true for us all. No doubt it was brought home to the apostle in a special manner, but the thing that he so realised is true of us. Then, at the close of the chapter, is seen the other extreme, namely, the terrible state into which a saint can get. We read of envyings, wraths, strifes, uncleanness, fornication, etc. So bad indeed was their state that the apostle could not even go to Corinth. It was such a corrupt place, that it had even passed into a proverb among the ancients; and it was found true even of the saints there, that “evil communications corrupt good manners.” Hence the apostle says, “I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not.”

At first he would not go back to them, but now his first letter had wrought upon the minds of the Corinthians, and they had put out the man who had committed the dreadful evil. Titus too had been to them, and had come back, and had told him of their repentance and mourning and fervent desire towards him, so that his heart was comforted. Still they were in a very difficult position, and great snares were around them, for he says here, “I fear lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes,” etc. There had even been such fornication among them as was not so much as named among the Gentiles. True, they had received the apostle’s reproof, and the man was put out; but they were so used to it, to see evil everywhere around them, that they did not feel it. It is different with us; for we have been brought up to feel and judge everything by a sort of moral light that has been in the world since Christianity has been professed. But they had been always accustomed to unclean-ness; they had corrected things in the main; but still the apostle was trembling about them. “I fear lest when I come… I shall be found unto you such as ye would not.” I shall be found very severe with you: I may come with a rod. He trembled lest he should be forced to exercise this kind of severity towards those who had not repented.

We get then, the extreme, in the beginning of the chapter, to which a Christian can go in spirituality, and in the end of it the extreme to which he can go in the flesh. Such is the awfulness of the evil that remains in us even as Christians, and, on the other hand, the blessedness to which a man can be carried in spiritual enjoyment. Of course, it is not that every one goes up into the third heaven; but all have the blessedness, on

the one hand, of a man in Christ, and, on the other, the incorrigible wickedness of the flesh—I do not say of a man in the flesh, for this is not a Christian state at all. We see what the place of a Christian is, looked at in his privileges, and then what he is, looked at in his path down here; and how it is that a person, with the possibility of all this infirmity, if he is not walking watchfully—how it is that he can walk according to his privileges. Because here we are in a world of temptation and evil, and we have got the flesh, that the devil is always seeking to draw us aside by; and how is a person, walking in the midst of temptation, with the flesh there and the devil too, to walk according to this heavenly condition in which he has been put? The first thing is to know what the privilege is. The apostle was made to enjoy it in an extraordinary manner; but the place which he gives to himself is one which, in principle, belongs to every Christian. The title that took Paul to the third heaven takes all there. We do not realise it now to the extent that he did, but still that title gives us our place there. We are come to God in glory now; that is the place that is given to us. And therefore he says, I do not talk about Paul: “I know a man in Christ.” I do not get a man in the flesh, but a man in Christ. That is where the Spirit of God sets a Christian. It is the place of every believer. They may have great exercises of heart before getting there; but where he sets them is not in the flesh but in Christ. This is not the flesh, it is the glory at the right hand of God. A man in the flesh cannot be there.

Where the apostle says, “When we were in the flesh,” he means that we are so no longer; it is a past thing. If I say, When I was in Bristol I did so-and-so, it means that I am not There now. In that way it is he says, “When we

were in the flesh." He had had the commandment, and might assent to it that it was good, but he could not get power through it. It was not with him then, rejoicing in the Lord always, and saying, Of such an one will I glory. But there was his very being, his nature, his walk, all opposed to God; and the consciousness that he had of himself and his flesh was this: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." That is what he got the consciousness of before God. Supposing the man was desiring to do the right thing, but did not do it—rather did what was the contrary—he had the consciousness that this was what he was before God. In Romans 7 he was walking in sin and death in the first Adam, and he had to answer for it. In chapter 8 he says another thing. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit." There we have the man in Christ, and "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." There is the not walking after the flesh, but after the Spirit, that will be seen. But where is now the power for it? "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Mark that where he is under the law, and has got these holy desires, that which the new nature always must desire, he sees that the law is right, he consents to the law that it is good, but he also finds another law in his members, bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. He sees that it is of no use. How can I stand before God? I wish the right thing, and do the wrong thing. Am I not answerable to God? and how can I answer to Him, if I am always doing the thing that is wrong? All through this part of Romans 7, mark, he does not speak of Christ, but of a man in the flesh. It was not that there were not new desires, but he did not do them; and there he was, a

responsible man, having to answer for his own condition before God; and he says, My condition is all wrong, “O wretched man that I am,” etc. This was true, but what was he speaking of all the time? The law. “We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” It was not merely that the law judged any gross misconduct, but it required from him what he ought to be, quickening his desire and wish to be it, and yet he was not it. “I consent to the law that it is good.” He has got to do with law.

Again, what does he delight in? “I delight in the law of God, after the inward man.” I have got a desire after what is right, but I have not got a Saviour. I have got a law, and what does the law say? You must love God with all your heart. But I do not that. Then you are lost—it requires from me what I ought to be, but what I am not. It requires from a man that he should not covet; that he should love God with all his heart, and soul, and might, and his neighbour as himself. But who is the man from whom that is required? Why, it is a man in the flesh, with all the lusts of the flesh constantly dragging him into evil. The law required from a man that is a sinner that he should not be a sinner. It is just that. If I then, as a responsible being, am under law, what can it do? Why, condemn me—righteously condemn me. It could not do anything else but condemn me. It comes and requires from me, when I am a sinner, to be what, as a sinner, I cannot be; and therefore a man in the flesh, if the law of God comes, is condemned. It must condemn him, because the heart is so thoroughly corrupt and bad, that the very fact of a command being given, only brings out the evil that is there. We know it by experience in our own hearts. If there were anything upon this table, and I

were to say, Nobody is to know what is there, at once everybody would be longing to know what it was. This is just human nature; it is not the fault of the law at all.

Supposing you have children: they may have no particular desire to go out of the house, but if you tell them not to go and put a barrier to hinder them, then comes a child that wants to go out, and, if it finds the barrier there, it will push all the harder against it to get out. The law says, I must have obedience; but I have a disobedient will. The law says, I cannot have a lust; but the lust is there, and therefore the law says, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”— and the law of God is righteous, of course, in saying that. But in all this I do not get a word about Christ. I get the claims of God over man, looked at as responsible, as a child of Adam, when he is in his sins, and calling upon him for no sins. The effect of this is altogether condemning—I cannot get rid of it. It is not merely that I give way to certain evil things again and again; but the tree is bad—the will is wrong. Now, this is just the contrast of what we find in Christ. When Christ comes, He says, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.” And so it is with the saint in his measure. But the law being there, and the lust being there, the effect of a claim upon him is morally to bring the consciousness that, looked at in the flesh, he is a sinner in the sight of God. It shews him his real condition, but does not take him out of it, and therefore he cries out, “O wretched man that I am,” etc. He had been striving to be better, and the only result was, that he gets this experience of himself by God giving him the law, which is the standard of what he ought to be.

Then he says another thing, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? “He is looking now, not at how he, as in the flesh, should be better, but that another should come and take the matter up for him and go through it all. This is where the soul is brought when it is converted—when it discovers itself to be not merely a sinner but without strength. I now get the consciousness of the weakness that sin has produced in my flesh, and I say somebody must take up the work for me; I cannot do it myself. I have the consciousness of what sin has made me in the presence of God, and I cannot get rid of that condition. “Who shall deliver me?” Mark the answer. He says, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is all settled. He is thanking God already. Why so? Because “what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh “(the law was all right; but “what the law could not do”), “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” There I get God doing the whole thing. What the law could not do, because of this principle of sin that is in me, God sending His Son has done. Supposing I were to say to my child, You, love me, and if you do not, I will whip you. Do you think it would make my child love me? Certainly not. I should not get a bit of love from him. So with the law. The law says, Love God, but this never produces love. Commandment never produces love, nor changes the nature that does not love. What then can do it? “We love him because he first loved us.”

The law tells me that God is a righteous Judge. It tells me what I ought to be; but what does it tell me that God is, except that He will not have unrighteousness? It tells me that I am to love God, but does it tell me what the God is that I am to love? It says nothing about it. It says

you are to love Him, and if you do not you will be punished. But it tells me nothing of what He is, that I may love Him.

But what does the gospel tell me? It tells me, you have not loved God, but God has been loving you all the time. Now, that is the starting-point for the soul. God has loved me when I did not love Him. It is true that we get new thoughts and desires; but when I am simple, the effect is, that my conscience, getting into the light, sees and judges all my sins in the light; but I find that this love of God, having sent Christ, and Christ coming in the same love, God does not say, I will help you to love me, but He says, I will love you: you cannot get rid of that sin in the flesh, but I will love you. “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son … for sin condemned sin in the flesh.” Where did He condemn it? In the cross. Now, then, I am pardoned; now I am free. I see the love of God, that when I had got into this terrible condition of death in sin, in the flesh, Christ has been there, and it is condemned. The sentence of God has been put upon it, and it is done. And that is why, looking at Christ, he can say, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ.” When he has seen what a man is, looked at as responsible to God under the law, he says, “O wretched man that I am.” But then he sees that Christ has been here, and done it all for him, and he can say, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The man now is not standing as himself, a sinner responsible to God, because he has owned himself entirely lost in that state: and now what he has learnt is this, that God has sent His Son, and has condemned sin in the flesh. Therefore there is no condemnation. God

has condemned it already, and thus he comes to be not a man in the flesh, but a man in Christ. That is what we get in chapter 8. He is looked at as in Christ; he has got Christ as his life in the presence of God; no longer as in the flesh but in the Spirit. Now he can say, I am in Christ. The second Adam, after having put away my sin on the cross, and having risen again, communicates this life to me. It is the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us. I have seen this life; I have looked at Christ walking through this world, and there I see what love, what blessing was in all His ways; what tenderness, what patience with His disciples. There, I say, is eternal life, life according to God, and it has been manifested to me. In chapter 2 of his epistle, John says, “Which thing is true in him and in you.” And now my standing in the presence of God is not in the old wretched flesh, but I am a man in Christ, because Christ is my life. This is the place in which we are set. Christ is my new life, and I am in Christ in the presence of God.

In the case of Paul, when this truth was carried to the highest possible realisation, he was in the third heaven. The body could have no part in such a place as that. There he was, not knowing whether he was in the body or out of it; and that is what he calls “a man in Christ.” He is a man that is living, and really having his life from Christ, and united to Him in the power of the Holy Ghost, joined to Him in one Spirit, and that not in his condition as a child of Adam.but as born of God. So that when I look at Christ as walking in this world, I can say that this is my life. I see this life in Him in all its perfectness, and I say, That is very precious. I see that very eternal life, which was with the Father, and I say, That is my life. I had a life in the first Adam, that

brought in the bitter fruits of sin and corruption, but now I have got the life of Christ. But Paul could not stay in the third heaven; he had to walk in this world. But even as walking through the world it must still be taking this blessed One as our life. When I see Christ walking in this world, was there anything inconsistent with this heavenly place? Never. He was the manifestation of the divine nature down here. Now that is what you ought to be. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.” I get, that is, not merely what man under the law but what the divine nature is, expressed in a man upon earth, and that is what a Christian ought to be. He is a man who has become a heavenly man; who has got his place in the presence of God, sin for ever put away, and the Holy Ghost uniting him to Christ, and in spirit and faith in the presence of God. And now he has to act so in the world, not as in the flesh, but the flesh being there; and in trials and duties of all kinds that he has to go through he is to abide with God. If he cannot abide with God in what he has got to do, he must give it up.

But Paul gets back to the world, and now comes trial. The flesh comes in. He has been in the third heaven; he had got this wonderful abundance of revelations, and the flesh says to him, There has not been a person in the third heaven but you. Now he is puffed up, and certainly this is not heavenly; it is the very contrary of it. And this is the way the flesh will use even being in the third heaven. He is not puffed up when he is there, because it is the presence of God, and nobody can be proud in the presence of God. Persons fancy that it makes people proud to be in the third heaven. Never! The danger is, when you get out of the third heaven, of the flesh being

proud of having been there. We feel our nothingness in the presence of God. But now Paul finds that the flesh was just as bad and mischievous as ever. Wherever the flesh works, if it gets into the thought of the third heaven, it makes mischief, and if you could give a man the thought of a fourth heaven, it would only be worse. There is no mending it. And what does God send? A thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him.

There is grace, however, in this that Satan himself must be God's servant in the world, just as it was in Job's case. Who begins the business with Job? Was it Satan? No, it was God. God says to Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth," etc. And then God allows Satan to bring Job to the very point where He wanted him, the discovery of what he was. Job said, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor that cried," etc. And he had done it: this was his third heaven, and therefore the Lord allows Satan to break him down entirely. And what does he say then? "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is exactly what He wanted. Satan had been used as an instrument of God to bring Job into the condition of being made nothing of in his own eyes, and then God can bless him. It is very disagreeable work to get to know ourselves, but very useful work. Peter is sifted, and has to learn that this confidence that he has in himself is the very occasion of his failure. In the end the Lord not only restores his soul, but makes him the channel of blessing to others. When you know your own utter nothingness, then you can go and help others. Go

and feed my sheep, the Lord says to Peter. It is very humbling and trying to be made nothing of, but very useful, because we are all disposed to think too well of ourselves.

Lest then Paul should be exalted above measure, a thorn in the flesh is given to him. We learn from the Epistle to the Galatians that it was something that made him contemptible in his preaching. It was something to keep him from being puffed up, but this is not strength. We have got the blessedness of Paul in the third heaven. We have got the man in Christ who can thank and bless God for what we are made in Christ—who can say of all of us, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." But after this we have another thing, the flesh and its inclination to be puffed up. And then we find a third thing, the flesh made exceedingly disagreeable. But this is not strength—on the contrary, it is the emptying of strength. You cannot get God to help the flesh and to help self-will. He will break it down. He will humble you by it, but He will never help it. He breaks the vessel, that we may know that the power is not of man but of God. So that he says here, "When I am weak, then am I strong." When I am weak, I feel that I am weak. I know the truth about myself. Here the apostle was preaching, and his manner of preaching was contemptible, and yet hundreds of people were converted through it. Well, this does not come from what is contemptible: it does not come from Paul but from God. The Lord then, when He had made him feel his weakness, says, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." If Paul had got strength, Christ need not have had so much for him; but

if Paul had none, the strength that came from Christ was in him. The man had been brought into conscious weakness that the power of Christ might rest upon him.

Now there I have got, not the man in Christ, but Christ in the man, and this is what I want down here. If I think of the man in Christ, it is perfection. But when it is a question of walking down here, we want strength as well as sincerity— we want power. If the power be in myself, there is the old man set up, and this will not do. The old man must be set down, and then another power comes in. I have Christ with me. I am a dependent man. Christ said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” We see Him constantly dependent and always right. There is what is so difficult for us. We get into mischief just when we get into independence of God. And therefore it is that we so often see a Christian have a fall, after a season of great joy. Why? Because his joy has taken him away from dependence upon God. When I am emptied of self, and am in distresses and infirmities and necessities for Christ’s sake, then I can say, I will glory in them. Why? “That the power of Christ may rest upon me.” Now, there is where there is to be blessing: made nothing of in one’s own consciousness, but then to have the consciousness of the power of Christ resting on me. This is not the man in Christ, but the power of Christ resting on him as he walks down here—it is Christ in the man. Supposing I am emptied of self, and Christ is living in me, what shall I get? I shall not be always in the third heaven, but Christ is always there. I have got my security there, my life there, my righteousness there, everything there that I need. Christ is my title: I am in Christ, and not in the first Adam.

The robe that was put upon the prodigal son when he came home he had never had before. It was not a patching up of his old rags, but a new robe. The best robe was brought out and given. So what we had in Adam is lost and never can be recovered, but we get a new and far higher thing. An innocent man is one who does not know good and evil. A holy man knows good, and loves it. It is not now mere innocence, but what Christ is worth in the presence of God that I have got. The robe that the father put upon the prodigal was a new robe out of the treasures of his own house, that he had never had before. God has given us Christ in heaven. I am not always in the third heaven, but Christ is there, and my place and title is to be there by faith, according to the working of the Spirit of God. If Christ is my life, there is nothing in that life inconsistent with the third heaven. The Christ that is in heaven, even when He was walking upon earth, could say, “The Son of man which is in heaven”; and all His life down here was the expression of that. Our union with Him is a real living union. I am in Christ above, and this Christ is in me below; and there I find the principle of all my walk, and the power of it too. I may be about my work and business, but in that work and business have to live Christ—to walk in the Spirit of Christ, whatever circumstances I am in. Supposing I am doing that, the Spirit is not grieved, and I enjoy the third heaven; I have not been inconsistent with it. I have not been there, but I have walked consistently with it, because I have walked in the Christ that is there. He is both my life and the power of my life. If I have been in the third heaven, and come out of it to be engaged in service, I may go on with my affections the same, spiritually and morally; and when I go back to it, I enjoy it all the more. Take a man

working for his family all day long. He may have to labour hard and away from them, but when the work is done, he comes back and enjoys them all the more. So the Christian, besides being in the third heaven, has to walk through the world. But Christ is his righteousness, his title for being there, and therefore his place is in heaven; and, walking in the power of that life, he is back into the third heaven as happy and fresh as ever.

We may fail in it, but this is what the power of Christ resting on us down here works in us. Mark how he speaks as regards our title to take such a place. “I know a man in Christ… Of such an one will I glory.” In that we ought to glory. If I say I am in Christ, I glory in it. I -say, What an astonishing place God has put me in! He has taken me out of the ditch, and placed me with His Son. He takes a thief up on the cross, and puts Him in the same glory as the Son of God. He takes a Mary Magdalene, from whom He casts out seven demons, and puts her in the same glory as the Son of God. I am to glory in that. And what is the effect down here? That I shall be made a fool of. If you talk of a man in Christ, Of such an one, he says, I will glory; but if you talk of me, Paul, why I was going to be puffed up about having been in the third heaven! There can be no good at all for me, unless I am emptied of self. When there, so little thought was there of self, that he did not know whether he was in the body or out of it.

People may say all this is presumption. Allow me to say a word about that. Are you in Christ? If you are not in Christ, you are lost; it is no good saying it is presumption. If you are not in Christ you are lost; if you are in Christ, you are safe. What is the effect? Is not Christ your righteousness? Are you not going to glory in

that, not in yourselves? We do not think badly enough of ourselves as sinners in the flesh. If I know what it is to be lost—without Christ, I shall not think it presumption to glory in being in Him. I have no need to think of myself, because I am perfectly happy in the presence of God. He has made me happy by the grace that has brought me there, and by the present communion that I have with Himself in the place in which He has put me. We have to be taught practically, and therefore Paul had this thorn in the flesh. After he knew his own wretchedness, and Christ his righteousness, there was the perfect learning of his own nothingness. This is the grand work which remains for us. We are in Christ as our righteousness; but if I have only a light thought, this is not communion with God, though grace comes in, and there is intercession. The man in Christ has got his standing with God; and when he has that, his business is to manifest Christ before the world. There he wants power, and the power comes, not merely from having been in the third heaven, not merely from being made the righteousness of God in Christ. He wants present power. To be sincere is not enough.

You will meet with temptation; you will have your business, your trials of one kind and another, and you want the power that gives Christ a preciousness to you, that makes everything you meet with to be as nothing to you. It is Christ Himself that becomes your power—the power of Christ resting upon you. Now, I ask you, whether you can say, “When we were in the flesh”? It is an important thing, and the apostle, speaking of it, says, “When we were in the flesh.” Have you learnt that the ground upon which you stand before God is not the ground upon which the first Adam stood, but that God

has put you upon a new ground in the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, I say, you are a man in Christ, and therefore you must walk as Christ walked. But if not, you have got a lesson to learn, to have your souls realising that we are lost without Christ, and, therefore, if we are to have hope of anything, it must be in Christ. And God puts us in Christ; and then I say, that I am in Christ before God. He bore my sins, and put them away —blotted them out for ever. But though there is the power of the new life and the presence of the Holy Ghost, of myself I will not glory, save in what pulls this wretched flesh to pieces; but in Christ I will glory.

Do you desire to manifest Christ to the world? You will say you want power; but if so, you must be emptied of self, and find Him your righteousness before God; and His power you get in your weakness, as your power to walk through this world. Then our hearts can say, Come, Lord Jesus.

The Lord give you to know what it is to value Him now, first as poor sinners, knowing Him as meeting all your need, and then in the communion of His love, as One that is dear to our hearts, whom we long to know face to face, in all His fulness.

The Love Of Christ, And The Experience That Flows From It

Ephesians 5

There are two points seen distinctly in our salvation and in the ways of God. The first is God bringing His thoughts to pass about us in grace, the second is the dealings of God with us, so as to bring our souls into the full enjoyment of both the source and effects of all His thoughts. And I am sure we ought to take heed to the difference of those two things, if we are to walk wisely as Christians. We need to hold both distinctly—God accomplishing His thoughts about us in grace, and His dealings with us to bring us into the enjoyment of them. The first is as sure, settled, and stedfast, as God Himself is, because “Hath he spoken, and will he not do it?” But the other is His work also, and it is a process that must be carried on in our souls. For God never can depart from what He is. None of His counsels can deny His nature. His nature is holy, and He must have us holy; His nature is love, and He must have us in love. He cannot have us enjoy Himself, which is His purpose in grace, in a way different from what His nature is.

What man got in the fall is the knowledge of good and evil. This must be worked out in our hearts, if I may so say, to the measure and thoughts of God. It is there that all kinds of exercises come in—discipline, if needed, sifting processes, etc., which go on in people’s hearts.

If it is a question of the accomplishment of God’s thoughts, He brings them about. He has called us, and, when the time comes, He will glorify us, as it is said,

“Whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” So we find here, “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it … that he might present it unto himself a glorious church, not having spot nor wrinkle, etc.” But then there is this other thing which our hearts have to notice (and it is all grace), that we are brought—our minds and souls are brought—to enjoy God. Now, we must all be conscious how often, either positively or negatively, our souls are short of enjoying Him. Sometimes we enjoy something else, or our hearts are dull and cold with God. But we must not confound in our hearts the full certainty of salvation through God’s work, and the actual enjoyment we have of it; nor, on the other hand, by shortness of enjoyment, dim or cloud the certainty of His work. Our foolish hearts are apt to do both. But if we look at the truth, the word of God, I see as to the first that it is all quite settled. The apostle can even speak of it as a thing past. “Whom he justified, them he also glorified.” I am perfect in Christ. Beyond doubt the knowledge of good and evil is there, in our hearts alas! sadly dimmed; but still this is what we have got. I am brought into this condition, so that, if my heart is not according to the light I am brought into, I get the consciousness of it at once. There might be a person going on outwardly well for years, and yet all that time he is not brought into the light of God.

As to the first of these points, it is important to look at it as all settled. While our souls are exercised, and have got perhaps under law, we cannot understand this. We are looking at our own responsibilities, and are not thoroughly brought down and emptied of self. We have not yet real faith that the first Adam never has reached

God, and never will. These are exercises of the heart short of the full knowledge of redemption. But when I have understood that our whole condition as children of the first Adam is a rejected one, that all are sinners, and that sin cannot get into the presence of God—when that is wrought, I look to another thing. I see in a sense that that responsibility is over—that I am entirely lost. Through grace Christ takes my place, and I get into another position altogether; I am a new creature in Christ Jesus. This is not speaking of my practical condition, but of the place that I have got into in Christ. Not one single bit of the old nature can come in there. And this is as true of the life I received from God as it is of redemption— "that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." Of course, when the glory comes, there will be no difficulty in saying, It is entirely of God. All is perfect and settled, whether I look at the individual saint or the church of God as a whole. He has loved it, and given Himself for it.

So, again, when I look at all that has to be done, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it," etc., He takes God's work and cleanses it, and then presents it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing. Just as God in the garden of Eden presented Eve to Adam, so Christ will present the church to Himself, a glorious church and faultless. All that is blessedly certain; and if received as a divine truth, and mixed with faith in our hearts, we become thoroughly clear before God as to the new ground we have got; and no question remains whatever, because it is a question of the efficacy of God's work. It is a settled thing for my soul that, looked at in Adam as a sinner, I am utterly rejected, and that it is a question now of whether Christ

has done His work well. I have done my work, which virtually sent me to hell; and now it hangs upon God's work, which of course, is perfect.

The more one looks into it, the more there really is a deep sense of perfectness. I see the perfect love that is the source of it all—infinite unspeakable love, a love which God's very nature, and being, and purpose about us too, express. When I look at the way it is accomplished, I see the perfectness of Christ's work, the absoluteness of His obedience in giving Himself up entirely. He gave Himself for us altogether, not merely His life, but Himself. He "hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God," etc. The more I study it, the more I see the intrinsic blessedness of it, and the delight that God takes in it. It is a "sweet smelling savour to God." We cannot see it too completely in God*s hands. Christ "loved the church and gave himself for it"; that is the first thing. And then He sets about, after He has got it and made it His own, to sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. It is according to His own mind that He does it, and then He presents it to Himself a glorious church.

Now the effect is to put us into the light, as God is in the light—into that light which makes all things manifest. It is the fullest and completest work, in effect redeeming us from all iniquity. I need my conscience to be brought into the presence of God according to His own delight in what is blessed. There is no evil there, and we are made light. This is just as completely true as the redemption is perfect. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." Not merely you were in the dark, but you were darkness; but now you are light, and not

merely in the light. My nature, as born of God, exactly answers to what God is.

But now I come to another thing. I have a nature capable of enjoying God and being in the light. Yes. But what is the knowledge of good and evil? What place am I brought into by that knowledge? I am brought into the light, and I am light. And when these two things come together, when this divine nature in me and the perfectness of the divine nature in itself come together, practically and consciously, what comes of our judgment of all other things? It is then that the knowledge of good and evil takes its true and full character.

When we as light come into the light as God is in the light, having a nature capable of resting in it, in the power of this, all in my heart becomes judged according to what God's presence is. The light makes all things manifest, and I see everything perfectly and according to God. How can I enjoy this light? How enjoy God in fact? It is not a question here of salvation and peace, because it supposes you are in the light of God, that is, brought to God. My new nature takes cognizance of all that is not of God, and I say, What is this? I get my conscience occupied with all these things, and in the presence of God. Here exercises come in for the Christian on the very foundation of salvation. The very thing that gives the judgment of evil in his heart is that he has got to God, and that there, in His presence, he gets the right estimate of everything. It is not absolutely perfect, of course; but he gets the just estimate, according to the degree in which he knows God, of what he is himself. All these exercises may go on either gently or painfully; but there must be a bringing up in our souls

—a dealing with—good and evil, according to God's estimate of it.

This is founded on grace. I never should be able to think about good and evil in my path, and to walk according to such an estimate, except as knowing that Christ suffered, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. And here is the practical importance of the fullest clearness as to salvation. You will never see a person safe against the corruptions of Christianity where that full assurance is not known in his soul. If I am not brought to God, I must get something in the shape of a mediator between me and God. But Christ has brought us to God. And this assurance of salvation really is a part of Christianity; because what Christ has done in suffering, the Just for the unjust, is to bring us to God. But if I am looking for anybody or any ordinance as the means that is to carry on anything between me and God, I am not brought to God. As regards my walk here, I do want these supplies of grace; but if I want anything in order to keep up my condition with God, I am not brought to God. This was the principle of the Jewish system. There was the holy place, and again the holiest also into which the way was not then opened.

The principle of all priesthood supposes that the man has not got to God himself: he cannot go himself, and he will be glad to get some one to go for him; whereas, as a believer now, I do not want even Christ to go for me, because He is there already. Thus assurance of salvation is connected with Christ, and, in one sense, it is the very essence of it; because we are brought into the presence of God, and the effect of this in our new nature, the divine nature that is in us being in God's presence, is to make us judge about good and evil. His presence makes

us judge it, just because we are there and have a title to enjoy everything that is there. If a man is walking with God, he has the light of God upon his path: no part is dark. And this is what Luke himself tells us. “The light of the body is the eye; therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light,” etc. “Awake, thou that sleepest and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” Paul speaks there of a real Christian who has got asleep, who needs this perfection of Christ as the light of his path. Are you then thus gone to sleep? You are not dead really as to your condition before God, but you are walking like a dead man. You must awake and rise from among these dead people, and you will have the perfect light of Christ.

But supposing I have been asleep, and I wake up and find myself to have been walking among the dead, what is the effect of this light? It is to bring in the light of God upon the conscience, perhaps to the extent of clouding all joy, or even for the moment causing me to doubt of salvation. But the exercises of the soul that is holding fast the certainty of salvation, founded upon the word of God (which is the real starting-point of the Christian, and in virtue of which it is that he gets any exercises of soul), flow from this—that he looks at the inward state of his soul, and sees that it ought to be up to that full character of the presence of God in which we are placed. It is there that our daily exercises go on. God has brought us to Himself—brought us all to Himself, because this is the very position of the Christian. We may be passing through the world with different degrees of knowledge and acquaintance with Christ and power of communion, but, as far as His work goes, we are brought to God. The conscience has nothing inconsistent

with that light. Brought to God, as certainly as if we were in heaven, the effect is, as we are not really in heaven, to bring all our thoughts and ways into the light.

How far are we, from day to day and from hour to hour, walking where we are set? We walk in the light as God is in the light; that is, we are brought to God, who is light, and then it is a question of degree of realisation. Are you walking according to the light, as God is in the light? This is another question, and it is where practical exercise of soul comes in, founded on salvation, whether from day to day and hour to hour. I am not looking on the things which are seen, and temporal, rather than on the things which are not seen, and are eternal. His word is that which is the revelation of all that is not seen, but alone real and enduring. All the rest will perish—every thought of our hearts. Nothing but the word of the Lord abides for ever.

You will find, when speaking of Christ's work which He carries on, Paul speaks of sanctifying and cleansing the church. He is bringing it up towards this light, that He may present it to Himself a glorious church, etc. That is, in virtue of God's having brought us to Himself, we start from Him to pass through the world, with a divine nature and the knowledge of God according to that divine nature that is in us, and to judge everything that is in the world by that light. As it is said in 1 Corinthians 2, "He that is spiritual judgeth all things." How does he judge all things? It is not his own judgment; it is by that light which maketh all manifest.

Whatever the will of God allows as a path in the world, He gives light for it in His word. He shews us a path, and He gives the light for it, if I am walking in the light.

The question is, whether the path in which I am walking, and my ways, hinder or are the effect of my communion with God?— whether they are in the light? Does my path in every-day life come from the light, and is it guided by it? Does it flow from, and is it the effect of, my new nature being in communion with the divine nature—with God? That is the question. If not, it has not glorified God. I may not have sinned outwardly, or done anything positively wrong; but so far I am asleep. I am not thinking about it; and it dulls the spiritual sense. But when I awake, I find out that I am away from God, and all is disturbance with my spirit. I cannot see God clearly. The practical enjoyment of God by the new nature is interrupted by the workings of the old, so that the things of God and God Himself have got out of sight, and I am not quite sure where I can get hold of them. All will be bright where it is with God. There will be trials, and trials with God are perhaps the brightest spots in any man's life. If not, the soul's condition of enjoying God has been injured. When it cannot enjoy God, what a disturbed state it gets into I God is perfect love, I say, but I cannot enjoy it, if there is uncertainty as to His love.

I am sure of the sun while it is raining, but still I say, What terrible weather we have!—there is not a bit of sunshine. God will never make us doubt about His love, but He will make us feel the loss of it. He will bring us into the conscious sense of the loss of His love. He may make us find out some positive wrong thing that has done it, or a slothful state of soul in not acting in the light. But He loves us too well to let us go on, without finding it out sooner or later. God is perfect in His grace, and He deals with us so that if a person is walking with

God, we shall find weakness, but we are with Him about it directly. But where there is a failure in walking up to the light, where it is anything habitually wrong, there the soul gets away, not from the knowledge that God loves it, but it goes on asleep, and, when it wakes up, as it does, through mercy, it finds, perhaps, darkness as to everything—certainly as to the enjoyment of God. It is there where the exercises of soul come in, and the need of constant watching unto prayer. If it be not so, there will be the loss of the enjoyment of divine love; and when we get back into the presence of Him that loves us, that is the very time we get distressed and miserable.

But then we have the second part of Christ's work on the other hand, which is in constant exercise towards us —not His finished work of redemption. In the very verses before us, the first part looks at His finished work, and the second at His carrying on the work till He presents us in glory. "He loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it," etc. That cleansing is still His work to bring us up to the level of what God is; and then what is connected with it? "That he might present it to himself a glorious church," etc. It is that work which He carries on perfectly to the end. But there is another thing, and this He adds in verse 29: "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." Here I get the daily care of grace: the priesthood of Christ comes in. And it is of all importance that there should not be insensibility to it. The walk not being in the light makes us to have less intimacy with His daily care over us. This is going on constantly. A man takes care to do all for his wife as he would for himself;

so does Christ to the church. He nourishes and cherishes it. And our faith, if we are walking with God, can look for that for the church, in spite of everything. He nourishes and cherishes it through all and spite of all, as a man does his own wife.

We may speak of the ruin of the church, but Christ is faithful. You never can touch that—never can touch the fact for faith that Christ always nourishes and cherishes the church as a man does his own wife. He never ceases to do it. And it is our privilege to go along with Christ, to be associated with Christ in caring for the church. But in caring for it I may cast doubt on that very consciousness that He nourishes and cherishes it, so there is the continual exercise of faith in communion with God. We can count upon Christ actively. If I love the church and the saints rightly, I shall have the consciousness of Christ's love to them, and sympathy with Him in it. I shall have it, and my heart, in its love toward the saints, will be reckoning always upon Christ's love towards them, and so making it active. But we have this comfort, even where we fail, that He restores us, and intercedes for us. He is either maintaining, or bringing the soul, which has got away, back into the full enjoyment of the sunshine of God's perfect light. Only remember this, that it will always be wrought in the conscience and in the affections. I grant His love will attract us. He will tell me of His love, and make me find out, by recalling it, that I neglected it. It gets into the conscience and then comes exercise of heart, in order that the divine life should be perfectly unclouded upon my soul.

And then I can give thanks for everything; I can glory even in infirmities. The apostle Paul himself besought the Lord that the thorn in the flesh should be taken

away. But the moment he got the clue of divine love working in it, he said, I would not have it gone for the world. He glories in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Christ's every-day care over us, and the exercise of His love reveal that love, and bring the heart back to it. But all this is carried on in the conscience, which therefore gets exercised; and then the heart returns into the unclouded brightness of God's face, where we see everything is ours—life, death, things present and to come. This is founded upon the blessed truth, that we are brought to God, that the very meaning of salvation is that we are brought to Him, and have a nature which comes from God and enjoys Him. The Holy Ghost has the power to keep up the communion, and we are walking in the light.

How far has my soul been walking thus in the presence of God? Enoch walked with God, and God took him. Only let us remember that the life of Christ has been given to us, and that we are in the light, as God is in the light. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us. How far are our lives going on in this grace? God always has the state of the heart in His mind. He has various ways of dealing with the individual soul as He has with His church. But it is wondrous to see that God is every moment thinking of us—how to bring us up to the full enjoyment of His love.

The Lord give us to know the perfectness of that love. And then, while in the world where everything is passing, and where evil has come in and produced all kinds of confusion, there is a sense of divine grace that, if the sin has come in, grace has come in. The Lord give us to walk in the consciousness that we are brought into this, and then may we seek to enjoy it in communion! It

must be by faith and not by sight. We cannot see these things; but there is a divine work always going on. It may be either recognised or forgotten by us; but it is always going on. There is not an instant that we have not to say to God: there is many a one that we forget; and then I have to start up again, and say, Ah! where have I got to?

The Lord give us, in the full sense of His grace, to have our souls exercised before Him.