Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Volume 5: 1 Thessalonians to Revelation

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Preface to Volume 5

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Dear Reader,

I present to you in these pages the beginning of a work which I trust will be of use to you in the study of the precious Word of God. I also desire that the outlines you will find therein, giving you a glimpse of part of the wealth contained in the Word, may induce you to study it more carefully. I feel conscious, even more conscious than you could be, of the great and numerous imperfections that are found in this outline. However small one’s value of the Word may be; however little one may have felt its divine character, any work of man referring to it will be, in the eyes of a believer, quite colourless and poor. I feel this, and wish to say a few words to explain to you my object in publishing these thoughts, and to let you know what to expect in perusing them.

A few years ago a brother suggested that I should undertake this work, but until now, I have shrunk from the task, more because of a sense of my inability for such an undertaking, than because of my being occupied in the Lord’s service, although the latter may have accounted somewhat for the delay. The feeling that the Lord is near inclined me to devote myself to service rather than to undertake work in my study. The needs of brothers who are also in the Lord’s field, and most of them in a more useful way than I am, caused me to decide to set about this work, without, I hope, forsaking

a fitting humility, which I would rather maintain than accomplish any kind of work whatsoever. Several matters, however, weighed in the balance to hinder my commencing this task.

Firstly, the immense responsibility, which, when it is a question of the Word of God, attaches to the one who would give guidance to the thoughts of Christians; and however modestly it might be, to present ideas as being the intention of the Spirit of God. How grave an error to wrongly direct the dear children of God in the understanding of His thoughts and of His will; or to present as the purpose of His precious communications, that which may not be it!

Another consideration also checked me; it was the fear that anyone might assume to find in this work, the whole contents of the Word. The grave and serious harm of all commentaries is that they make room for this thought, lending themselves thus to the slothfulness of heart and the lack of spirituality which are satisfied with a few explanations, good, perhaps, in themselves, but which only give a few thoughts suggested by the Word and fall infinitely short of communicating its life, its power and its wealth. Nothing is more harmful than this laziness which prefers to dwell on a few thoughts rather than fathom the divine Word itself, which latter is denied to the soul who does not earnestly seek of the Lord, with diligence, spirituality and devotion, the knowledge which He alone can give. The reader therefore, will not find here any pretension to give him the whole contents of the Word. He will find— at least, such has been my desire and the object of my work—a few indications which will help him in the study of the Bible, but which will be useless to him without this study. I should have

rendered him an injurious service had I helped him to gather up ideas, at the same time diverting him from the living and true Word which puts us in touch with God Himself, places our hearts beneath that eye which sees all, which judges all; but which sees it in order to heal us and bless us.

A further and more personal consideration weighed with me a little—the fact that the task truly was very great. The influence of this thought vanished in the hope of being of service to my brethren; and, in the great joy I anticipated in performing the work, which joy indeed, I have not failed to experience. Even if my reader does not derive any great gain from it, I, at any rate, have the consolation that it has been of immense gain to me. Whatever may be, I do not regret having undertaken it. I beseech the reader not to read these pages without accompanying them with those of the Word, and to use them only for the study of the Word. My purpose is that the Word should be studied, and I even hope that it will be impossible to use these writings otherwise than in the study of the Word.

Finally, I did not propose to speak of the result the truth has produced in myself, nor give utterance to the godly emotions which gush up in the heart when the Word is rightly read. I intended to help my reader to understand that which should produce these feelings. I prefer to let them spring up through grace in his heart, rather than to impart to him much of what has taken place in mine. I simply express the desire that the effect may be not only the joy of knowledge, but of true communion with God.

I have only one word to add. I intended to publish a summary of all the books of the Bible, indicating as far

as it may be given to me the intent and thought of the Holy Spirit in each book. As it is a great undertaking it seemed that the work could very well be published in parts. The Pentateuch suggests itself naturally as a group which could appear separately. My work on the other books is well advanced, so that I hope to be able, God willing, to resume shortly the publication of this work. It is sweet to think that my brethren will help me with their prayers that I may have guidance from God in this work, and that His Spirit may preside over it, and that thus it may be a blessing to us all.

I must not finish this Preface without informing my reader that if he finds that which edifies in these pages, he will be largely indebted to the care and affectionate interest brought in by our brother M. H. Parlier, who has greatly helped me in editing.

May the teaching of the Holy Spirit Himself be granted to you, dear reader; may the Word become always more precious in these last days, and may an obedient spirit, mingled with love for all that belongs to Christ, be with you. This is the desire of your affectionate brother in Him.

J. N. Darby

Colossians

The epistle to the Colossians looks at the Christian as risen with Christ, but not, as in that to the Ephesians, as sitting in heavenly places in Christ. A hope is laid up for him in heaven; he is to set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth. He has died with Christ and he is risen with Him, but not sitting in heavenly places in Him yet. We have in it a proof of that

which other epistles demonstrate, namely, the blessed way in which our God in His grace turns everything to the good of those that love Him.

In the epistle to the Ephesians the Holy Ghost had developed the counsels of God with regard to the church —its privileges. The Christians of Ephesus had nothing to be reproached with:1 therefore the Holy Ghost could use the occasion furnished by that faithful flock to unfold all the privileges which God had ordained for the church at large, by virtue of its union with Jesus Christ its Head, as well as the individual privileges of the children of God.

It was not so with the Colossians. They had in some measure slipped away from this blessed portion, and lost the sense of their union with the Head of the body; at least, if it was not actually so, they were assailed by the danger, and liable to the influence of those who sought to draw them away from it, and subject them to the influence of philosophy and Judaism, so that the apostle had to occupy himself with the danger, and not merely with their privileges. This union with our Head (thank God!) cannot itself be lost; but as a truth in the church, or of realisation by individuals, it may. We know this but too well in the church of the day we live in. This however gives occasion to the Spirit of God to develop all the riches and all the perfection which are found in the Head and in His work, in order to recover the members of the body from their spiritual feebleness, or maintain them in the full practical enjoyment of their union with Christ, and in the power of the position gained for them by that union. For us this is abiding instruction with regard to the riches that are in the Head.

If the epistle to the Ephesians delineates the privileges of the body, that to the Colossians reveals the fulness that is in the Head, and our completeness in Him. Thus in that to the Ephesians the church is the fulness of Him who filleth all in all; in that to the Colossians, all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily, and we are complete in Him. There is another difference, however, which it is important to remark. In the epistle to the Colossians we do not—save in the expression, "love in the Spirit"—find any mention of the Holy Ghost. He is fully brought forward in the Ephesians. But on the other hand, we have Christ as our life far more fully developed, of equal importance in its place. In Ephesians we have more largely the contrast of heathenism with christian privilege and state. The formation of the soul in living likeness to Christ is largely developed in Colossians. It is more, in the well-known expressions, Christ in us than we in Christ, though these cannot be separated. A further important difference is that in Ephesians the unity of Jew and Gentile in one body holds a large place. In Colossians the Gentiles only are in view, though in connection with the doctrine of the body. These differences well noted, we may say that the two epistles have a great resemblance in their general character.

They commence in nearly the same way.2 Both are written from Rome, while the apostle was a prisoner in that city, and sent by the same messenger and on the same occasion, as well probably as that to Philemon: so the names and salutations give us reason to believe. The address to the Ephesians places them perhaps more immediately in connection with God Himself, instead of presenting them as in brotherly communion on earth.

They are not called brethren in Ephesians 1:1, only saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. They are viewed as walking on earth in Colossians, though risen. Hence there is a long prayer for their walk, though on high and holy ground as delivered. In Ephesians it begins with the full purpose and fruit of God's counsels. In that epistle the apostle's heart expands at once in the sense of the blessings enjoyed by the Ephesians. They were blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. For the Colossians there was a hope laid up in heaven. And there is a preface of many verses referring to the gospel they had heard, and introducing his prayer for their walk and state down here. This brings us where Ephesians 1:7 brings us, but with a much more enlarged development of the personal glory of Christ, and more in an historical way of God's actual dealings. It is also a more personal church address than the Ephesians.

But let us consider more closely that which is said to the Colossians. The blessed calling of which the apostle speaks (Eph. 1:3-10), and the privileges of the inheritance (11-14), are wanting in Colossians; risen but on earth, they are not sitting in heavenly places, all things being thus their inheritance. It is not they in Christ there, but Christ in them the hope of glory, and the prayer referred to above fills up the chapter till we come to the common ground of Christ's glory in Colossians 1:15; and even here the divine glory of Christ is brought out in Colossians, the simple fact of the purpose of God as to Christ in Ephesians. And not only we have not God's inheritance ours; but in Colossians the Spirit as earnest of it is not spoken of. This indeed we have seen is characteristic of Colossians. The Spirit is not spoken of, but life. We have the Person and divine

glory of Christ, and our completeness in Him, more insisted on in Colossians; but not the saints' place with God in the same way. Further, as the saint is looked at as on earth, not in Christ on high, his responsibility is brought in (chap. 1:23). Colossians 1:3 answers to Ephesians 1:16:only one feels that there is more fulness in the joy of Ephesians 1:16. Faith in Christ and love to all saints are found in each exordium, as the occasion of the writer's joy.

The subject of his prayer is quite different. In the Ephesians, where he develops the counsels of God with regard to the church, he prays that the saints may understand them, as well as the power by means of which they participated in them. Here he prays that their walk may be guided by divine intelligence. But this belongs to another cause, to the point of view from which, in his discourse, he looks at the saints. We have seen that in the epistle to the Ephesians, he views them as sitting in the heavenlies. Their inheritance consequently is that of all things which are to be gathered together under Christ as Head. Here he prays for them in view of a hope laid up for them in heaven; his prayer therefore refers to their walk, that it may be in harmony with the object which they had set before them. As on earth and in danger of not adhering to the Head, the believers in Colosse were in danger of departing from that object. He prayed therefore in view of that heavenly hope. They had heard of this perfect and glorious hope. The gospel had proclaimed it everywhere.

It was this gospel preached in view of a hope laid up in heaven which had produced fruit among men, fruit that was characterised by its heavenly source. Their religion,

that which governed their heart in these relationships with God, was heavenly. The Colossians were in danger of falling back into the current of ordinances, and of the religious customs of man living in the world, whose religion was in connection with the world in which he dwelt, and not enlightened, not filled with heavenly light. There is nothing but conscious union with Christ which can keep us securely there. Ordinances to reach Him can have no place where we are united to Him; the philosophy of human thoughts none, where we possess livingly divine ones in Christ.

Nevertheless how precious it is—even if we are not in the full height of our calling—to have an object set before our hearts which delivers us from this world, and from the influences which hide God from us! Such is the apostle's object in this scripture. He directs the eyes of the Colossians to heaven, in order that they may see Christ there, and regain that sense of their union with the Head which they had in some measure lost, or were in danger of losing. The groundwork was however there —faith in Christ and love to all saints. They only needed realising their union with the Head; which moreover could alone maintain them in the heavenly element above ordinances, above human and earthly religion.

The apostle, in order to raise them up, sets out as usual from the point where he found good in the saints to whom he wrote. This heavenly hope had reached them and had produced fruit. It is this which distinguishes Christianity from all other religions, and in particular from the Jewish system, which— although individuals who were in it by grace sighed for heaven— hid God behind the veil, and enveloped the conscience in a series of ordinances at a distance from Him.

Now, based upon this hope which placed the inner life of the Christians in connection with heaven, the apostle prays that the Colossians may be filled with the knowledge of the will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is the fruit of a risen man's connection with God on the earth. This is very different from commandments and ordinances. It is the fruit of intimate communion with God, of knowledge of His character and of His nature by virtue of this communion; and, although it refers to practical life, as belonging to the inner life, it leaves ordinances completely behind. The apostle had to begin at this practical end, at christian life. Perhaps the Colossians did not at first understand the bearing of these instructions, but they contained a principle which, already planted in their heart and capable of being re-awakened, led them to the point which the apostle aimed at, and was at the same time a very precious privilege, the value of which they were in a position to apprehend. Such is charity. The apostle develops their privileges in this respect with force and clearness, as one to whom such a walk was well known, and moreover with the power of the Spirit of God. They are not in heaven but on earth, and this is the path that suited those risen with Christ and looking to heaven from the earth. It is divine life on earth, not the Holy Ghost putting the soul of the believer at the centre of divine counsels, as in Ephesians 3 through Christ dwelling in the heart by faith.

The first principle of this practical heavenly life was the knowledge of the will of God—to be filled with it, not to run after it as a thing without us, nor in indecision, in uncertainty, as to what it was, but to be filled with it by a principle of intelligence which comes from Him, and

which forms the understanding and the wisdom of the Christian himself. The character of God was livingly translated in the appreciation of everything that the Christian did. And remark here that the knowledge of God's will is based on the spiritual state of the soul—wisdom and spiritual understanding. And this is of all practical importance. No particular direction by man as to conduct meets this at all—rather saves us from the need of spiritual understanding. No doubt a more spiritual mind may help me in the discernment of God's will;3 but God has connected the discovery of the path of His will, His way, with the inward state of the soul, and causes us to pass through circumstances—human life here below—to test and to discover to ourselves what that state is, and to exercise us therein. The Christian has by his spiritual state to know God's ways. The word is the means (compare John 17:17, 19). God has a way of His own which the vulture's eye hath not seen, known only to the spiritual man, connected with, flowing from, and to, the knowledge of God (compare Exod. 33:13). Thus the Christian walks worthy of the Lord; he knows what becomes Him,4 and walks accordingly, that he may please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the knowledge of God.

It was not then only the character of life: this life was productive; it bore fruit, and, as life grew up, by increasing knowledge of God. But this connection with God brings in another very precious consideration. Besides the character and the living energy which are in relationship with this knowledge, the strength of the Lord5 is developed in it also. They draw strength from Him. He gives it that they might walk thus. "Strengthened," he says, "with all power, according to

the might of his glory.” Such is the measure of the Christian’s strength for a life in harmony with the character of God. Thus the character of this life is revealed in the heavenly glory on high—Jesus Christ. On earth its manifestation—as it had been in Jesus Christ—is realised in all patience and long-suffering with joy, in the midst of the sorrow and afflictions of the life of God in this world. This form of the life too is striking: all divine strength according to His glory given in order to be patient, to endure. What a character it gives to the Christian’s life in this world! And there is a generous bearing with others which it enables us to maintain. Nor is anything a more manifest fruit of power than this. Will too is here subdued. Thus, in spite of all we have to endure, we have with God constant joy. It is a blessed picture of the form in which divine life manifests itself.

And here the apostle connects this life of endurance with that which is its source, its aim, and its present possession by faith. Walking thus we are full of joy, and we give thanks to the Father who has made6 us meet to share the portion of the saints in light. Here are the saints established in their proper relationship with God (their Father) in heaven—in the light, that which God is, and in which He dwells. Thus we have the state of the soul, the character of the walk, and the strength in which we accomplish it. As to meetness for God in light, we possess it. Moreover we are translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.

The means employed, and the practical character of the work which sets us in the light, are then presented, introducing us (as far as Colossians does) into the counsels of God, but in a practical way—in their results

future or present, not in counsel nor as the mystery of His will.

The Father has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transported us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. It is not a Jewish rule for man; it is an operation of the power of God, who treats us as altogether by nature the slaves of Satan and of darkness; and places us by an act of that power in an entirely new position and relationship with Himself. We see indeed here, if we examine the principles in their origin, the same thing as in Ephesians 1:4, 5; 2:1-6, as to our position before. But it is evident that the fulness and definiteness of a new creation are wanting.7 “The inheritance of the saints in light,” “the kingdom of the Son of his love,” remind us of Ephesians 1:4, 5; but it is not the thing itself, as it is in God’s mind, but our having been made meet for it when here; nor consequently the development of a position with which one is familiar as standing in it. The power and the love of the Father have made us meet for it, and although the character of God is necessarily there as light and love, according to His relationship to His Son, yet what we have here is not our own relationship with God Himself, outside the question of whence He took us, but the work in general which places us there in contrast with our previous position. He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son; we have part in the inheritance of the saints in light: but where is the saint “without blame before him in love? “where our relationship to Him, according to the counsels of Him who saw only the good which He purposed in His own heart? where the “children unto himself by Jesus

Christ," through His predestination before the world was?

In Ephesians deliverance is brought in as a consequence of the position in which the heirs, the objects of the eternal counsels of God are seen.8 Here deliverance is the chief subject. How dangerous and disastrous it is to depart from the Head, and to lose the full consciousness, in the light, of our union with Him! How perfect and precious is that grace which takes notice of our condition, and brings us out of it to God, to make us enjoy—according to the power and grace of God—the inestimable position which He has given us in Christ!

The means which the Spirit here employs to accomplish this work of grace is the development of the glory of the Lord, of the Son of His love.

Here alone, I believe, is the kingdom called the kingdom of the Son; and, I think, it is only as introducing His Person as the centre of everything and giving us the measure of the greatness of the blessing. It is the kingdom of One who has this place, the Son of His love, into which we are introduced. It is indeed His kingdom; and in order that we may apprehend the character of this kingdom as it is now for us, and our nearness to God as having part in it, it is called the kingdom of the Son of His love. It is this which is the present foundation and characteristic of the relationship with God of those who are truly in and of it. As the kingdom of the Son of man, it is His manifestation hereafter in glory and in government. Here it is characterised by the relationship of the Son Himself to the Father, in His Person, with the addition of that which gives us a full title to share it—redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

The apostle, having thus introduced the Son in His relationship to the Father, as the central and mighty object which was to attract the heart of the Colossians and set them free from the yoke of ordinances, sketches now the different parts of the glory of that Person. If therefore the assembly's own glory is wanting, that of Jesus is so much the rather set in stronger relief before us. Thus God brings good out of evil, and in every way feeds His beloved people.

The Lord Jesus is the image of the invisible God. It is in the Son of His love that we see what God is (compare John 1:18; and also 1 John 1:2). This is the first character of His personal glory, the essential centre of all the rest. Now, in consequence of this proper character of His Person, He takes by right the position of representing God in the creation. Adam was created in some sort in the image of God, and placed as centre in a creation that was subjected to him. But, after all, he was only a figure of the Christ, of Him who was to come. The Son, in His very Person, in His nature (and for us as in the bosom of the Father), is He who makes God known, because He presents Him in His own Person and in a full revelation of His being and of His character before men and in the whole universe; for all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him. Nevertheless He is a man. He is thus seen of angels. We have seen Him with our eyes or by faith. Thus He is the image of the invisible God. The perfect character and living representation of the invisible God have been seen in Him. Wondrous truth for us with regard to the Person of our Saviour!

But then what place can He have in creation when He has come into it according to the eternal counsels of

God? He could have but one, namely, that of supremacy without contestation and without controversy. He is the firstborn of all creation; this is a relative name, not one of date with regard to time. It is said of Solomon, “I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” Thus the Creator, when He takes a place in creation, is necessarily its Head. He has not yet made good His rights, because in grace He would accomplish redemption. We are speaking of His rights— rights which faith recognises.

He is then the image of the invisible God, and, when He takes His place in it, the Firstborn of all creation. The reason of this is worthy of our attention—simple, yet marvellous: He created it. It was in the Person of the Son that God acted, when by His power He created all things, whether in heaven or in the earth, visible and invisible. All that is great and exalted is but the work of His hand; all has been created by Him (the Son) and for Him. Thus, when He takes possession of it, He takes it as His inheritance by right. Wonderful truth, that He who has redeemed us, who made Himself man, one of us as to nature, in order to do so, is the Creator. But such is the truth.

In connection with this admirable truth, it was a part of God’s counsels that man should have dominion over all the works of His hands. Thus Christ, as man, has it by right, and will take possession of it in fact. This part of the truth of which we are speaking is treated in Hebrews 2; we shall consider it in its place. I introduce it here merely that we may understand the circumstances under which the Son takes possession. The Spirit speaks of the One who is man, but the One who is at the same time Creator of all things, the Son of

God. They were created by Him, they were necessarily then created also for Him.

Thus we have hitherto the glory of the Person of Christ and His glory in creation connected with His Person. In Him is seen the image of the invisible God. He has created all things: all is for Him; and He is the Firstborn of all that is created.

Another category of glory, another supremacy, is now presented. He takes a special place in relation to the assembly in the power of resurrection. It is the introduction of divine power, not in creation but in the empire of death; in order that others may participate in His glory by redemption, and by the power of life in Him. The first glory was, so to speak, natural— the latter special and acquired (although in virtue of the glory of His Person) by undergoing death, and all the power of the enemy in it. Accordingly it is connected, as we have just said, with redemption, and with the introduction of others into the participation of the same privileges. He is the Head of the body which is the assembly, the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence. He is the Firstborn of creation, He is the Firstborn9 according to the power of resurrection, in this new order of things in which man is predestined to an entirely new position, gained by redemption, and in which he participates in the glory of God (as far as that which is created can do so), and that by participating in divine life in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and everlasting life; and, as regards the assembly, as members of His body. He is the Firstborn of creation, the Firstborn from among the dead; the Creator and the conqueror of death and the enemy’s power. These are the two spheres of the display

of the glory of God. The special position of the assembly, the body of Christ, forms a part of the latter. He must have this resurrection-glory, this universal pre-eminence and superiority also, as being man, for all the fulness (namely, of the Godhead, see chap. 2:9) was pleased to dwell in Him. What place could He have except that of first in all things! But, before speaking of that which follows, some important remarks are yet to be made on that which we have been considering.

The Son is here presented to us as Creator, not to the exclusion of the Father's power, nor of the operation of the Spirit. They are one, but it is the Son who is here set before us. In John 1 it is the Word who creates all things. Here, and in Hebrews 1, it is under the name of Son, that He, who is also the Word, is revealed to us. He is the Word of God, the expression of His thought and of His power. It is by Him that God works and reveals Himself. He is also the Son of God; and, in particular, the Son of the Father. He reveals God, and he who has seen Him has seen the Father. Inasmuch as born in this world by the operation of God through the Holy Ghost, He is the Son of God (Psalm 2:7; Luke 1:35). But this is in time, when creation is already the scene of the manifestation of the ways and counsels of God. But the Son is also the name of the proper relationship of His glorious Person to the Father before the world was. It is in this character that He created all things. The Son is to be glorified even as the Father. If He humbles Himself, as He did for us, all things are put into His hands, in order that His glory may be manifested in the same nature in the assumption of which He humbled Himself. And already the power of life and of God in Him is manifested by resurrection, so that He is declared to be

the Son of God with power by the resurrection. This is the proof of it.

In the epistle to the Colossians that which is set before us is the proper glory of His Person as the Son before the world was. He is the Creator as Son. It is important to observe this. But the persons are not separated in their manifestation. If the Son wrought miracles on earth, He cast out devils by the Spirit; and the Father who dwells in Him (Christ) did the works. Also it must be remembered, that that which is said is said, when He was manifested in the flesh, of His complete Person, man upon earth. Not that we do not in our minds separate between the divinity and the humanity; but even in separating them we think of the one Person with regard to whom we do so. We say, Christ is God, Christ is man; but it is Christ who is the two. I do not say this theologically, but to draw the reader's attention to the remarkable expression, "All the fulness was pleased to dwell in him." All the fulness of the Godhead was found in Christ. The Gnostics, who in later years so much harassed the assembly, used this word "fullness" in a mystical and peculiar sense for the sum and source (and yet after all, in the sense of a locality; for it had limits which separated it from everything else) of divinity which developed itself in four pairs of beings—syzygies —Christ being only one of a pair.10 It is not necessary to go further into their reveries, except to observe that, with different shades of thought, they attribute creation to a god either inferior or evil, who also was the author of the Old Testament. Matter, they said, did not proceed from the supreme God. They did not eat meat; they did not marry; at the same time they gave themselves up to all sorts of horrors and dissoluteness; and, strange to

say, associated themselves with Judaism, worshipped angels, etc.

The apostle was often in conflict with these tools of Satan. Peter also mentions them. Here Paul sets forth, by the word of God, the whole fulness of the divinity of Christ. Far from being something inferior, an emanation, or having a place however exalted in those endless genealogies, all the fulness itself dwelt in Him. Glorious truth with regard to the Person of the Lord our Saviour! We may leave all the foolish imaginations of man in the shade, in order to enjoy the perfect light of this glorious fulness of God in our Head and Lord. All the fulness was in Him. We know indeed the Father, but revealed by Him. We possess indeed the Spirit, but the fulness of the Spirit was in Him, and because, having accomplished our redemption and our purification, He then received that Spirit for us. And God Himself in all His fulness was revealed, without any reservation, in the Person of Christ; and this Christ is ours, our Saviour, our Lord. He has been manifested to us and for us. What a glorious truth for us!

It is for His own glory, no doubt, that He should be known as He is, as love; but it is not the less true that this revelation was in connection with us. It is not only the Son revealing the Father, sweet and precious as that fact is; it is the fulness of the Godhead as such that is revealed and shewn forth in Christ. It was the good pleasure of the fulness to dwell there.

But Christ was not only the Head of creation in virtue of the divine glory of His Person, and the Head of the assembly as risen from among the dead and victorious over the power of an enemy; creation, and all those who

were to form the assembly, were alike far from God, and the latter were so even in their will; to be in relationship with God they must be reconciled to Him. This is the second part of the glory of Christ. Not only was it the good pleasure of the fulness of the Godhead to dwell in Him, but by Him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of the cross. This reconciliation of things in heaven as well as on earth is not yet accomplished. Peace is indeed made by the blood, but the power has not yet come in to bring back the whole into actual relationship with God according to the value of that blood.

Thus, in Israel, the blood was put upon the mercy-seat, and expiation—peace, was made; but besides this everything was sprinkled, and the sins of the people were confessed. This, with regard to Israel and to creation, has not yet been done. As to that which is outward, it remains still at a distance from God, although peace is made. We know that it is the good pleasure of God to reconcile all things in heaven, and on the earth, by virtue of this blood. All things shall be restored to order under a new rule. The guilty, remaining in their sins, will be outside this scene of blessing; but heaven and earth will be completely freed from the power of evil (and even from its presence during the millennium, as regards manifestation— still later, absolutely from its presence itself), according to the virtue of that blood which has separated between good and evil, according to the character of God Himself, and so glorified God that peace is made. God can act freely for blessing; but here the work is twofold, like the glory of the Person of Christ, and refers to the same objects as His glory. It is in the counsels of God to

reconcile unto Himself all things in heaven and on the earth through Christ. But Christians He has already reconciled. Once not only defiled, like the creature, but enemies in their minds, He has already reconciled them in the body of His flesh by means of death. The perfect work which Christ accomplished in His body, blotting out our sins and perfectly glorifying God His Father, has brought us into relationship with God in His holiness according to the efficacy of that work; that is to say, it is efficacious to present us, perfectly reconciled, holy, without blemish and without blame, before His face; and with the consciousness of it, and of the love that has wrought it, and the favour into which we are brought, so that in the sense of this the heart is brought back to God: we are reconciled to God. This supposes that we continue steadfast in the faith unto the end.

The position of the Colossians gave room for this warning, being viewed as walking on earth.11 We have seen that they had a little departed, or were in danger of departing, from the realisation of their union with Christ.

It will be noticed also, that the apostle speaks of his gospel as spread abroad in all the world. Grace had overstepped the narrow limits of Judaism and the expectation of the Messiah, in order to make known the testimony of the perfect love of God in the whole creation under heaven, of which Paul was the instrument as the apostle of the Gentiles.12 Hitherto, then, the Spirit of God has set before us the two pre-eminences of Christ, that over creation and that over the assembly, and the two reconciliations which answer to them; namely, first, that of the things over which Christ is set as Head, that is, of all things in heaven and earth;

and second, that of Christians themselves: the latter already accomplished, the former yet to come. The ministry of the apostle had now the same double character. He has not undoubtedly to preach in heaven; but his ministry is exercised in every place under heaven where there is a soul to hearken. He is a minister of that gospel; and then he is a minister of the assembly, a distinct service or ministry, making known its true position and its privileges, connected indeed with the other, in that the gospel went out also to the Gentiles to bring them in (v. 23, 25). By this last instruction he completed the word of God: an important principle with regard to the exclusive authority of the written word, which shews that its totality already exists, demonstrated by the subjects which it comprises; subjects which are entirely completed, to the exclusion of others which people may seek to introduce. The circle of truths which God had to treat, in order to reveal to us the glory of Christ and to give us complete instruction according to His wisdom, is entire, when the doctrine of the assembly is revealed. There were no others to be added.13 But this doctrine in particular exposed the apostle to persecution and sufferings, which the Jews especially, and the enemy sought in every way to inflict upon him. But he rejoiced in this as a privilege, because Christ had suffered on account of His love for the assembly—for His own. The apostle speaks here, not of the efficacy of His death, but of the love which led Him to suffer. Looked at in this point of view, the apostle could participate in His sufferings, and we also in our little measure; but the apostle in a peculiar manner, as the special witness-bearer to this truth. If Christ had been content to accept the position of Messiah according to man, He would have been well received. If

Paul had preached circumcision, the offence of the cross would have ceased: man could have taken part in the religion of God, if His religion had recognised man in the flesh. But if God is revealed, if His grace extends to the Gentiles, if by this grace, and without having respect to the Jew more than to the Gentile, He forms an assembly, which is the body of Christ, sharing the heavenly glory of His Son—this is what the flesh cannot endure. To be thus shut out as nothing worth before God, even in its religion, take what pains it might —this is unbearable. This is the source of the enmity of the Judaising spirit, which is founded on the flesh, on man, and which is constantly reappearing in the apostle's history, whether as exciting the hatred of the heathen, or as corrupting the doctrine of Christ and the simplicity of the gospel. Religion in the flesh boasts its own peculiar privileges (see Phil. 3).

Thus we have a double ministry, as well as a double preeminence of Christ, and a double reconciliation; and each having a similar relationship the one to the other: Christ, the Head of all things in heaven and earth, the Head of the assembly; all things in heaven and earth are to be reconciled, Christians are reconciled; Paul exercises his ministry in the whole creation under heaven, he is the minister of the assembly. Naturally his ministry was limited to the earth. In every respect the extent and bearing of the glory of Christ, and of the ministry, went beyond the limits of Judaism, and were in contrast with the whole system.

The apostle then insists on the second part of his ministry, of which he had been just speaking; dwelling however particularly on that which met the need of the Colossians, and developing it, in order to secure them in

the enjoyment of the whole circle of these precious truths. He completed the word of God by announcing this mystery, which had been hidden from all ages and generations, but was now manifested to the saints. No display of the ways of God since the creation had (in the truths on which it was founded, in the revelation of God —of His power, or of His thoughts, which formed its basis and gave it its character) contained the mystery contained in the doctrine of the assembly. It had not been communicated to any of those who formed part of the system which preceded it, or who were the medium of light to others, as instrumental in the revelation of the light of God. Angels, men, Israel, the prophets—all were alike in ignorance of it. The assembly (this body united to the Son of God become man and glorified) and the calling of the Gentiles into that unity was hidden from them all.

Now that Christ the Head of the assembly, the Head of the body, was glorified, the mystery of this body was made known. The apostle here dwells on one particular side of this subject, which, after the Person of Christ, forms the centre of all God’s ways. This side is Christ in us, especially as Gentiles, the hope of glory. And in this again we see how the saints are viewed as on earth, though in the power of resurrection. The aspect here given of the mystery is, Christ in us down here, not union with Him actually in glory, though inseparable from that. In fact, this mystery was in every way a new thought, a new truth. That which was known was a Messiah who should be manifested among the Jews, the accomplishment of glory in their midst; the Gentiles at most having part in it, as subordinate to the people of God. But according to the doctrine of the assembly,

Christ invisibly dwelt in the midst of the Gentiles,14 and even in them; and as to the glory He was only the hope of it. A Christ dwelling in the hearts of men, and of men formerly rejected and outside the promises, and filling their hearts with joy and glory in the consciousness of union with Himself—this was the wondrous mystery prepared of God for the blessing of the Gentiles. It was this Christ, a Christ such as this, whom Paul preached, warning every man, and teaching every man according to the full development of the wisdom of God, which wrought mightily in the apostle by the Spirit, in order that he might present every man in a spiritual state answering to this revelation of Christ, as being also its fruit. Not that every man would receive it; but there was no longer any limit. AH distinction between them was blotted out, alike by sin and by grace, and there was but one thing to do; that is, to seek that every man, by the power of the word and the Spirit, should reflect Christ and grow up unto the stature of His fulness, as revealed in the doctrine committed to the apostle. He laboured for this according to the working of Christ in him; for Christ was not only the object, but the power that wrought to form souls after His own image.

Now this power wrought in the apostle’s weakness; in a human heart, that felt the necessities of men and the difficulties that occurred by the way—that felt them as a man, although according to God, and was the fruit of His love. He desired that the Colossians should understand the conflict he had for them, and for all those who had never seen him, in order that they might be encouraged and be thoroughly united in love; so that they might understand, in all the riches of a full assurance, the mystery of God.

The apostle felt that it was this which they needed and which would be a blessing to them. He knew that union with Christ, realised in the heart, was a safeguard from the wiles of the enemy, to which the Colossians were exposed. He knew the unutterable value of this union, and even of its realisation by faith. He laboured, he wrestled in prayer—for it is indeed a conflict—in order that the full sense of this union with the glorious Head might be wrought in their hearts, so that the Christ on high should be in them by faith. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were found in the mystery, of which this was to their souls the centre and the power. They had not to seek elsewhere. Science, falsely so called, might pretend to furnish them with heights to which the simplicity of the doctrines of Christ did not reach; but in fact the wisdom of God and the depths of His counsels left these cloudy efforts of the human mind at an infinite distance. Moreover they were truth—reality—instead of being but the creatures of imagination inspired by the enemy.

For this reason the apostle had brought forward these marvellous revelations of God respecting the double glory of Christ, and with regard to His Person. He declared them in order that no one should beguile the Colossians with enticing words. He avails himself of the order that existed among them, and of their faith to guard them against the danger they were in from these thoughts, which might glide unperceived into their minds, while all was yet going on well, and the consciousness of their faith was not touched. This often happens. People have faith in Christ, they walk well, they do not perceive that certain ideas overthrow that faith; they admit them, while still maintaining the

profession of faith together with these ideas; but the force of the truth and the sense of union with Christ and the simplicity that is in Him are lost. The enemy has so far attained his end. That which is received is not the development of Christ, but something outside Him.

Therefore the apostle says, “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him; rooted and built up in him, and confirmed in the faith, even as ye have been taught.” When we have received Christ, all the rest is but a development of that which He is, and of the glory which the counsels of God have connected with His Person. Knowledge, or pretended knowledge, outside this, does but turn us away from Him, withdraw our hearts from the influence of His glory, throw us into that which is false, and lead our souls into connection with the creation apart from God, and without possessing the key to His purposes. Thus, since man is incapable of fathoming that which exists, and of explaining it to himself, his efforts to do so cause him to invent a mass of ideas that have no foundation, and to endeavour to fill up the void that is found in his knowledge through his ignorance of God, by speculations, in which (because he is at a distance from God) Satan plays the chief part without man’s suspecting it.

Man, as a child of Adam, is not at the centre of the immense system of God’s ways. Out of Christ and without Christ, he does not know the centre; he speculates, without foundation and without end, only to lose himself more and more. His knowledge of good and evil, and the energy of his moral faculties, do but lead him astray the more, because he employs them on higher questions than those which simply relate to physical things; and they produce in him the need of

reconciling apparently inconsistent principles, which cannot be reconciled without Christ. Moreover the tendency of man is always to make himself, as he is, the centre of everything; and this renders everything false.

Christians then ought to walk with simplicity in the ways of the Lord, even as they have received Him; and their progress ought to be in the knowledge of Christ, the true centre and fulness of all things.

When man occupies himself philosophically with all things, the insufficiency of his own resources always throws him into the hands of an intellectual leader, and into tradition; and, when religion is the subject, into traditions which develop the religion of the flesh, and are suited to its powers and tendencies.

In those days Judaism had the highest pretensions to this kind of religion, allied itself with human speculations and adopted them, and even pursued them assiduously; offering at the same time proofs of divine origin, and a testimony to the unity of the Godhead, which the absence of the grossness of Pagan mythology and the meeting of human consciousness of the divine rendered credible. This relative purity tended to remove —for enlightened minds—that which was disgusting in the Pagan system. The Jewish system had, by the death of Jesus, lost all pretension to be the true worship of God; and was therefore suited (by the advantages it offered in the comparative purity of its dogmas) to be an instrument of Satan in opposing the truth. At all times it was adapted to the flesh, was founded on the elements of this world, because by its means, when owned of God, God was proving man in the position man stood in. But now God was no longer in it; and the Jews, moved by

envy, urged the Gentiles to persecution; and Judaism allied itself to Pagan speculations, in order to corrupt and sap the foundations of Christianity, and destroy its testimony.

In principle it is always thus. The flesh may appear for a time to despise tradition, but that which is purely intellectual cannot stand in the midst of humanity without something religious. It has not the truth nor the world which belongs to faith, and for an immense majority superstition and tradition are needed; that is to say, a religion which the flesh can lay hold of, and which suits the flesh. God by His power may preserve a portion of the truth, or allow the whole to be corrupted; but in either case true christian position and the doctrine of the assembly are lost.15 We may indeed find philosophy apart from the religion of the flesh, and the latter apart from the former; but in this case philosophy is impotent and atheistic, the religion of the flesh narrow, legal, superstitious, and, if it can be so, persecuting.

In our chapter we find philosophy and the emptiness of human wisdom united with the traditions of men, characterised as “the elements of this world,” in opposition to Christ: for we have a heavenly Christ who is a perfect contrast to the flesh in man living on earth, a Christ in whom is all wisdom and fulness, and the reality of all that which the law pretended to give, or which it presented in figure: and who is at the same time an answer to all our wants. This the apostle develops here, shewing death and resurrection with Him as the means of participating in it.

And first all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. Instead of the misty speculations of men and

fantastic aeons, we have the fulness of God bodily, in a real human body, and thus efficaciously for us, in the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second place we are complete in Him; we need nothing out of Christ.16 On the one side, we have, in Him, God perfectly presented in all His fulness; on the other side, we possess in Him perfection and completeness before God. We are wanting in nothing as to our position before God. What a truth! What a position! God, in His perfect fulness, in Christ as man; we in Him before God, in the perfection of what He is—in Him who is Head of all principality and power, before which man in his ignorance would incline to bend the knee! We are in Him, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells as to His Person; in Him, who is above all principality as to His position and His rights as Christ, man exalted on high.

The apostle then enters into some details of application to demonstrate that the faithful have all in Christ, viewed according to the position which He has taken without having anything to seek elsewhere here below.

Circumcision (the divine token of the covenant with the Jews, and of the putting off the flesh, which was required in order to form part of God’s people) had its reality in Him. By the power of the life which is in Him, and which is theirs— being made partakers of the efficacy of His death—Christians account themselves to be dead, and have put off this body of sin by faith. This is the true circumcision of Christ made without hands. Circumcision made by hands was but the sign of this putting off the body of the flesh—the privilege of the Christian in Christ. Having a new life in Christ, he has efficaciously put off the old man.

We are buried with Christ by baptism (this is its meaning), in which also we are risen with Him by faith in this operation of the power of God whereby He was raised from among the dead. Baptism was the sign and expression of this;17 faith in the operation of God which raised Him, the means by which is effected in us this marvellous resurrection with Christ into a new state and scene—this happy death, or rather this precious participation in the death of Him who has accomplished all for us. And when I say “faith,” it is the power of God’s Spirit working in us. But it is the power of God Himself, as it wrought in Christ, which works in us to give us the new standing in life. Viewed in connection with our resurrection with Christ it implies—by the very fact of our receiving it—that we are forgiven perfectly and for ever. We were under the burden of our sins, and dead in them. This burden Christ took upon Himself, and died for us, accomplishing what put away our sins in going down into death. Raised up with Him, inasmuch as partaking of that life which He possesses as risen from the dead, we have—like Him and with Him—left all that burden of sin and condemnation behind us with the death from which we have been delivered. Therefore He says, “Having forgiven you all trespasses.”

Christ, when He arose, left death and the weight of condemnation under which we were lying, behind Him—we also being raised up with Him. Naturally God, in thus raising us up from the state in which we were, has not raised us up to condemn us, or with condemnation attached to this new life, which is Christ Himself. For He had already borne the condemnation, and satisfied the justice of God, and died for the putting away of sin, before He communicated this life to us. God brought us

out of death and condemnation with Christ who had borne it for us. But this is connected with another aspect of this work of grace, spoken of here, and also in Ephesians, and even in John 5 and 2 Corinthians 5. He who is alive in sins is dead in them towards God. If I look at him as alive in them, death must come in and has come in on the cross (see Rom. 6). This side is not brought forward in Ephesians; only death in Romans; in Colossians death and resurrection in Christ, of which we have spoken. In Ephesians this is not spoken of at all. We are viewed as dead in sins, dead towards God, and all good is a new creation according to God's counsels. We are quickened together with Christ when dead in sins. This also is taken up in Colossians: only it is not spoken of as a new creation. But in both a new life is given when we are dead; only Ephesians begins with this in Christ raised and exalted, and by the same power in us. In Colossians it is introduced as completing what is taught of the administration of this doctrine of death in baptism, and our resurrection by faith of God's operation in Christ. In Ephesians grace finds us dead and quickens with Christ. In Colossians it finds us alive in sins and brings in death and resurrection, and completes this by quickening with Christ.

All the ordinances likewise, which belonged to the rudiments of this world and which applied to man in the flesh, and weighed as an unsupportable yoke upon the Jews (and to which they endeavoured to bring others into subjection), which put the conscience always under the burden of a service unaccomplished by man, and a righteousness unsatisfied in God—these ordinances were blotted out. In them the Jew had put his signature, so to speak, to his guiltiness; but the obligation was

destroyed and nailed to the cross of Christ. We receive liberty as well as life and pardon.

This is not all. There was the strength of principalities and powers against us—the might of spiritual wickedness. Christ has vanquished and despoiled them on the cross, having triumphed over them in it. All that was against us He has put aside, in order to introduce us, entirely delivered from it all, into our new position. It will be seen here, that what the apostle says of the work of Christ does not go beyond that which He did for our deliverance, in order to set us in the heavenly places. He speaks (v. 10) of the rights of Christ, but not as sitting in the heavenly places, nor as leading the enemy captive; neither does he speak of us as sitting in Him in the heavenlies. He has done all that is necessary to bring us into them; but the Colossians are viewed as on earth, though risen, and in danger at least of losing the sense of the position which was theirs in virtue of their union with Christ, and were in danger of slipping back into the elements of the world and of flesh, of the man alive in the flesh, not dead, not risen with Christ; and the apostle seeks to bring them back to it, by shewing how Christ had accomplished all that was requisite—had taken out of the way all that prevented their attaining it. But he cannot speak of the position itself: they were not consciously in it. In the things of God we cannot comprehend a position without being in it. God may reveal it. God may shew us the way of it. The apostle does so here with regard to the Person of Christ, which alone could bring them back to it; and at the same time he develops the efficacy of His work in this respect, in order to set them free from the shackles that kept them back, and to shew them that all obstacles had been

removed. But in detail he has to apply it to the dangers that beset them rather than to display its glorious results in heaven.

Jewish ordinances were but shadows, Christ is the substance. By bringing in angels as objects of homage, and thus putting them between themselves and Christ, they would separate themselves from the Head of the body, who was above all principalities. The simplicity of christian faith held fast the Head, from which the whole body directly drew its nourishment and thus increased with the increase of God. It looked like humility, thus to bring themselves into relation with angels, as superior and exalted beings who might serve as mediators. But there were two faults of immense importance in this apparent humility. Firstly, it really was thorough pride—this pretension to penetrate into the secrets of heaven of which they were ignorant. What did they know of any position held by angels, which would make them the objects of such homage? It was pretending to mount up into heaven for and by themselves, and to measure their relations with God's creatures without Christ, and at their own will to connect themselves with them. Secondly, it was to deny their union with Christ. One with Him, there could be nothing between Him and them; if there were anything, then they were dead and twice dead. Besides, by this union they were one with Him who was above the angels. United to Him, they received, as we have seen, a communication, through all the members of the body, of the treasures of grace and life which were in the Head. The mutual links between the members of the body itself were thereby strengthened, and thus the body had its increase.

Two applications of the doctrine that they are dead with Christ and risen with Him follow (chap. 2:20). He applies the principle of death to all the ordinances, and to the asceticism which treated the body as a thing vile in itself which ought to be rejected; and (chap. 3:1) he uses the resurrection to raise their hearts into a higher sphere and to bring them back to Christ by looking up, they being dead as regards the old man.18 To make these instructions more plain by shewing their connection, we may remark that the apostle points out the double danger, namely, philosophy, and human tradition, in contrast with Christ (chap. 2:3; see v. 9-15). While identifying us with Christ, he speaks of the bearing of the work of Christ Himself rather than of this identification. In verses 16-19 he applies it first (v. 16) to subjection to ordinances, that is, to the Jewish side of their danger; and then (v. 18) to the Gnostic philosophy, 19 science falsely so called, which linked itself with Judaism (or to which Judaism linked itself), reproducing itself under a new form. From verse 20 the apostle applies our death and resurrection with Christ to the same points, or to the deliverance of the Colossians by raising their thoughts on high.

But the Colossians are not the only ones who may have been in this danger. In the main these principles have been the ruin of the church at all times. They are those of the mystery of iniquity,20 which has so much ripened since then, and produced effects so various, and under such different modifications, on account of other principles which have also acted, and under the sovereign providence of God. We shall see the deep, simple, and decisive principle which is involved in it in the verses that follow.

The verses already quoted, as far as the twentieth, had judged this whole Judaeo-philosophic system from the point of view of Christ's work, of His resurrection, and of union with Him in His heavenly position.

That which follows judges it after our position. The preceding verses had demonstrated that the system was false, because Christ and His work were such as is declared in them. The passage we are going to consider shews that this system is absurd, cannot be applied to us, has no possible application, because of our position. On the one hand it is a false system, null and void in all its parts, if Christ is true and is in heaven; and, on the other hand, it is an absurd system in its application to us, if we are Christians. And for this reason: it is a system which supposes life in this world, and relationships to be acquired with God, having their foundation in that life, while it pretends to mortify flesh; and yet it addresses itself to persons who, for faith, are dead. The apostle says, that we are dead to the rudiments of this world, to all the principles on which its life acts. Why then, as though we were still living (alive) in it, as though we were still alive in this world, do we subject ourselves to ordinances which have to do with this life, and which suppose its existence?—ordinances which apply to things which perish in the use of them, and which have no connection with that which is heavenly and eternal. They have indeed a semblance of humility and self-denial as regards the body, but they have no link with heaven, which is the sphere of the new life—of all its motives, and all its development; and they do not recognise the honour of the creature, as a creature come out of the hand of God, which, as such, has always its place and its honour. They put a man in

and under the flesh, while pretending to deliver us from it, and they separate the believer from Christ by putting angels between the soul and the heavenly place and blessing; whereas we are united to Christ, who is above all these powers, and we in Him.

These ordinances had to do with merely corruptible things— were not connected with the new life, but with man living in his life of flesh on the earth, to which life the Christian is morally dead; and as far as regarded this life, they did not recognise the body as a creature of God, as it ought to be recognised.

Thus the system of ordinances had lost Christ, who was their substance. It was connected with the pride that pretended to penetrate heaven, in order to put itself in relation with beings whom we do not know in such a manner as to have any relations with them—pride which in so doing separated from the Head of the body, Christ, and thus disowned all connection with the source of life, and with the only true position of the soul before God. This system falsified equally our position on earth by treating us as though still alive after the old man, whereas we are dead; and dishonoured the creature as such, instead of recognising it as coming from the hand of God. That which was a danger to Christians in the apostle's days characterises Christianity at the present time.

The Christian's position was thus set forth, but in its application thus far rather to the danger of Christians than to their heavenly privileges. Thus grace has provided us with all we need, using every privilege, using the faith of some, giving warnings and instruction

above all price, and turning the faults of others to account.

Now begin the direct exhortations founded on the truth that has been developed, and adapted to the state in which the Colossians were; that is, viewed as risen with Christ, but not sitting in heavenly places.

Risen with Christ, they were to set their affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and not on things on the earth. The two could not go together. To look, to have one's motives, above and below at the same time, is impossible. Be tempted by things, have to resist them, we may; but this is not to have them as our object. The reason for this is however found in our position: we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. It does not say, "we must die." Man cannot do this by will: we cannot deny will by will. Nor would the will of the flesh ever do it. If it acts, it does not abdicate. We are dead: this is the precious comforting truth with regard to the Christian by virtue of Christ having died for him. He has received the life of Christ, and all that Christ did for him in that life belongs to him. Thus he is dead, because Christ died for him. The life with which the power of temptation, guilt, the attacks of sin, are connected, exists no longer to faith. By death all that was connected with it has come to an end. Now that which was connected with the life of the old man was sin, condemnation, weakness, fear, powerlessness against the assaults of the enemy—all that is past. We have a life, but it is in Christ; it is hidden with Him in God. We are not yet manifested in its glory, as we shall be manifested before the eyes of all in heaven and earth. Our life is hidden, but safe in its eternal source. It has the portion of Christ, in whom we

possess it. He is hid in God, so also is our life: when Christ shall appear, we shall also appear with Him.

It will be remarked, that the apostle does not speak here of our union with Christ, but of our life, of the fact that we are dead, and that our life is hid with Him in God. He does not speak of the assembly with regard to our position; he speaks, no doubt, of Christ as being its Head, as to His personal glory, but not of it as to us. He speaks of us individually. Each one has his own life in Christ truly, but as his own; it is not union with other Christians. We have this life in Christ, but it is not here our union as one body with Him. It is the individual character of the Christian, to whom Christ, the Head, is everything.

That which is also highly important to observe in connection with this truth is that in this epistle there is nothing said of the Holy Ghost. The apostle speaks practically of their love in the Spirit, but in the instruction of the epistle he does not name Him. Even when he says, “there is neither Jew, nor Greek,” etc., it is in the new man, not because we are one in Christ. The individual was to cleave to the Head. He was no longer living in this world; he was dead, and his life hid with Christ in God. But this was for himself; he was to know it, and hold it fast for himself, as necessary truth, that he might be preserved from the wiles of the enemy. In a word, it is life in Christ. Elsewhere we see many of the things which the apostle here mentions spoken of as the fruit of the Spirit, by which communion and union are maintained; but here it is simply in the nature of the life that these fruits have their source. It is quite natural consequently, that the compass and the assemblage of all spiritual relationships in one, in Christ, which we find

in the divine instruction when the Holy Ghost is introduced, are wanting here.

In the epistle to the Ephesians this operation of the Holy Ghost is found everywhere, and characterises the whole of that which is developed in communion with the Head, Christ, with whom we are united in one body by the Spirit. Thus we are individually sealed by the Spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance; we all have access to the Father by one Spirit; we are also builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit; the union of the Gentiles in one body is now revealed by the Spirit; saints are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man; there is one body and one Spirit; we are not to grieve the Spirit; we are to be filled with Him; the word itself is the sword of the Spirit. The union of the body with Christ, our resurrection with Him, that we are sitting in the heavenlies in Him—all that flows from this union, is fully developed; but at the same time the Holy Ghost, who unites us to Him, and unites us all together as one body, and who here below characterises the presence of God in the church, who acts in us, secures our future, and becomes our strength in the present—the Holy Ghost, I repeat, is found everywhere, to complete the truth and to give it its present force for us here below.

Many of the exhortations in the epistle to the Ephesians are nearly the same as those to the Colossians. But in the epistle to the Ephesians they are connected with the Spirit; in that to the Colossians, with the action of the word and of grace in the heart. This gives an immense range and a connectedness to the doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians, in that which regards our position here below, because it brings in God Himself, and as

dwelling in us by the Spirit, and filling us, whether as in the individual or in the oneness of the body; and gives the full scope of the counsels of God.

Yet the possession of life is in its way as important as the presence and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. It makes the blessing ourselves, not merely an operation in us, and, as we have seen, the character of divine life is far more fully developed; whereas in Ephesians it is more contrast with the previous state.

In the epistle to the Romans we have (chap. 8) this action and presence of the Holy Ghost presented in a very remarkable way as to the individual. He characterises us vitally in the principle of our resurrection, is the witness in us that we are children, filling us with joy and with the hope of glory as heirs, the support of our weakness and the source of our petitions and our groans. In the epistle to the Romans it is in connection with our personal relationship to God; in that to the Ephesians, as the presence of God in us in connection with our union to Christ as one body.

There is another thing to be noticed here which throws light on the purpose of the Holy Ghost in these epistles. The starting-point in that to the Ephesians is the counsels of God. Man is looked at as he is, without one pulse of life as regards God j he is dead in trespasses and sins, by nature the child of wrath. God is rich in mercy; He raises him up with Christ who in grace went down into death, and places him according to His counsels in the same position as that Christ is in. We are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus. God is pleased to bring us into His presence according to His own counsels and His nature. It is not said that we are

dead with Christ. Man is not viewed as living in the flesh, so that in one way or in another he had to die. This was not necessary. The Ephesians were to apprehend, on the one hand, the full contrast between God and man according to His counsels; and, on the other, man's sinful state according to nature. In their epistle all is the work of God Himself according to the original purpose of His own heart, of His nature, and of His will;21 man is already dead, and even Christ is not brought in as to His place till viewed as dead, and thereon risen and exalted on high.

The Colossians were in danger of subjecting themselves to ordinances, and thereby were in a position to consider man as living in the world; and the apostle makes them feel that they are dead with Christ. He was obliged in grace to follow them where they were, for their danger was to take man into consideration as living on the earth; in order, nevertheless, to shew that the Christian had already died with Christ, and his life on earth was as risen with Him.

In the letter to the Ephesians man is not said to die with Christ. He is dead in his sins when God begins to act towards him. No man is alive to God. The Christian is quickened together with Christ, Christ Himself first viewed as dead.

This character of the Colossians however, the dwelling on life or the new man, has its value for us all, and a great value, because the life, the new nature, and grace working in it, are much less brought forward in the epistle to the Ephesians, where the subject is the energy of God, who creates men in Christ and unites them to Him, fills the believer and the assembly here with the

nature and the character of the new man, and thereby of Christ, yea, of God Himself.22 One might suppose that there was only the Holy Ghost acting in the fulness of His power, and filling the individual and the assembly. But in this epistle to the Colossians we find that there is a new nature, an intrinsic change, not of the flesh indeed, but of the man. For we are viewed, not merely as quickened by the Son, but as dead and risen with Christ, the Man who had died, so as to have passed out of—put off—the old standing of a child of Adam, and into a risen one with Christ—put on the new man. This is at once a standing and a state before God, a source of tastes, of sentiments, of desires, of arguments, and of moral capacities, which are in connection with the very nature of God, who has caused it to spring up in the heart. We are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created us. But this source is a life, which needs that the Holy Ghost should reveal to it the objects that are suited to it, and that awaken these tastes and feelings, which satisfy them and cause them to grow. It needs that the Spirit of God should act in it to give it strength; but it is a real life, a nature which has its tastes attached to its very existence;23 which, being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, is conscious of its own existence; and in which we are the children of God, being born of Him.

Neither is it unimportant that we should learn, with regard to the life of the flesh, and when thinking of it, although it be on the negative side, that we are dead; that God recognises nothing belonging to the old man; that He takes pleasure in a new nature, which is indeed ours by grace, but which is of God Himself, and which is the moral reflection of His own.

We are dead then, and our life is hid with Christ in God. We have members on earth—no recognised life; and we have to put to death[24] all these members of the old man. The Christian has to deny them practically as belonging to the old man, while his life is there where Christ is. They bring down the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Christians walked in these things when they had their life in them; but this is no longer the case; and they deny not only gross sins, the fruit of positive lusts (chap. 3:5, 6), but all the workings of an unbroken will and an unsubdued heart, every indication of the actings of the will of that nature which knows not God, and is not ruled by His fear, all anger and malice and falsehood flowing from selfishness or the fear of man (v. 8). Truth reigns in the heart which has put off the old man, according to the simplicity of the new man,[25] which is renewed also in knowledge after the image of Him who created it (v. 9, 10). The new man walks in the light. It is not only that there is a conscience which judges good and evil according to that which man ought to be according to his nature as a responsible being; there is a new man who judges the old man altogether, judging good and evil according to the knowledge of God. Such is the putting off.

Before Christianity, which is the full revelation of God, there were indeed, as need not be said, souls born anew; but their rule, when a rule was definitely given, was man’s responsibility (whatever piety and grace might inspire), and the law, which was the perfect measure of that which man, as a being responsible to God, ought to be. Saints then did not distinguish between a new and an old man, although of necessity they had the conscience of the old man, and the tastes of the new in

measure in many respects. The sense, for instance, of the evil of falsehood had not at all the same place as with the Christian. Now the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him.26 God Himself in His nature is the standard of good and evil, because the new man has the knowledge of what that nature is; he is made a partaker of it, and he has the light of God. It is an intelligent participation by grace in the nature of God, which is the marvellous and precious privilege of the Christian. God works in this nature; but by communicating it He has placed man in this position. Christ is the perfect model of this image, the type of the new man.

Other differences have disappeared: there remains but the old man, which we only acknowledge as dead, and the new man. To the latter Christ is all; so that there is none but He whom they see and whom they acknowledge, and He is in all believers. They put on therefore as such, as elect, holy, beloved (Christ being their life), the character of Christ, mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if offence has been given, even as Christ has done to us.27 Finally they put on love, the bond of perfectness, that which gives a divine character to all the qualities that have been enumerated, and that were manifested in Christ, and a divine check on taking amiable nature for divine grace, for divine love is holy.

And note here, that the putting on of these qualities is in the consciousness of the blessed place before God expressed in the words “elect of God, holy and beloved.” It is as such. Nor can we do it otherwise. It is in the

sense of this wondrous favour that grace develops itself in our hearts. So in Ephesians, “as dear children.”

Several of these qualities may be resembled by things in nature; but the energy, the features, the bond of divine love, which acts in the sense of communion with God, are totally wanting in the latter; and this gives a character, a completeness, a righteousness of application, a perfection, a propriety, and an energy to the manifestation of these qualities, which love alone can give. For it is indeed God Himself who is there, acting in His nature which He has imparted to us. For He who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. With regard to the state of the soul, there is a crown to this walk, wherewith they who follow it constantly are adorned. The peace of Christ reigns in the heart, that sweet and ineffable peace which nothing could disturb, though His spirit passed through everything to try it, for He walked ever with God. God has also called us to this; He is the God of peace. And here the apostle introduces the oneness of the body, not as to its privileges in Christ, but as to the fact that Christians are called to be together in the unity of which peace is the seal and the bond. And then there will be thanksgiving; for the soul is conscious of the love and the activity of God, and everything flows to it from that love.

But, besides peace and thanksgiving towards God, there is the development of life in the knowledge of what is revealed, its food and joy. This too is enjoyed in the activity of life and love towards others. The enjoyment of God and of that which is in His presence leads to this activity of the soul. When the latter is real, it is the joyful liberty of a nature that is itself in health, the activity of love that is natural to it, and which receives its energy

from communion with God, according to His nature. The word of Christ unfolds all that is revealed to the soul as that in which it lives, and in which it expands itself, and is thus the rule, and active and directing power, because it is the expression of that nature, and the revelation of all its ways, and of its active energy in love in Him.

The apostle therefore exhorts that the word of Christ may dwell in them richly. This is the development, according to the perfection of God, of the new man, and the wisdom of God to form and direct him. Paul desires that Christians may fully realise this. It is by communion with the Lord, holding intercourse with Him, that it is done. The word being that in which the wisdom is found; also according to this development the saints can teach and admonish each other.28 But in this case it is not only wisdom that we learn, and that is displayed in us, but affections in connection with Him in whom we have found this wisdom, so that these expressions of the life of Christ as true wisdom in the world, find their voice in our hearts in praise, in thanksgiving, in singing His excellency. All the intimate affections in which spiritual life develops itself express themselves, according to what we have learned: they flow from the Spirit of Christ, and are the expression of the soul's connection with Him, and of the feelings this produces in the heart. Christ in His Person, in the consciousness of His presence, as the object of our thoughts, and in the moral fruits proceeding thence, sustains the intercourse and the communications of the soul that is occupied with His praises.

But this consciousness of relationship with Christ, in the life which is of Him in us, applies to everything. Nothing is done without Him. If He is the life, all which that life

does has Him for its end and object, as far as the heart is concerned. He is present as that which is the governing motive, and gives its character to our actions, and which preoccupies our heart in performing them. Everything relates to Him: we do not eat without Him; (how can we when He is our very life?) we do not drink without Him; what we say, what we do, is said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus. There is the sense of His presence; the consciousness that everything relates to Him, that we can do nothing—unless carnally—without Him, because the life which we have of Him acts with Him and in Him, does not separate from Him, and has Him for its aim in all things, even as water rises to the height from which it descended. This is what characterises the life of the Christian. And what a life! Through Him, dwelling in the consciousness of divine love, we give thanks to our God and Father.

Observe here that the christian life is not only characterised by certain subjective qualities which flow from Christ, but by its having Christ Himself for the aim and object of the heart and mind in all that we do in every respect. Christ personally reigns in, and is present to, the heart in everything.

To the inexperienced eye of man nature is often confounded with grace; but the intelligent consciousness of Christ as the heart’s object, of His presence, of the seal of His approval when one thinks of Him, cannot be confounded with anything. There is nothing that resembles it, nothing that can appear to take its place. When He reveals Himself to our heart, and the heart walks with Him, and communes with Him in all things, and seeks only the light of His countenance, the seal of His favour on the soul in all things, then He is known,

well known. There is none but He who thus communicates Himself to the soul when it walks in the way of His will, as expressed in the word.

After these great and important principles of the new life the apostle enters into the diverse relationships of life, giving warnings against that which would endanger them, by shewing what the christian character of each one of them is. To the wife, obedience—affection was natural to her. “Thy desire shall be to thy husband.” To the husband, affection and kindness—his heart may be indifferent and hard. Children are to be obedient; fathers, gentle, in order that the children’s affections may not be estranged from them, and that they may not be induced to seek that happiness in the world which they ought to find in the sanctuary of the domestic circle, which God has formed as a safeguard for those who are growing up in weakness; the precious home (if Christ is acknowledged) of kind affections, in which the heart is trained in the ties which God Himself has formed; and that in connection with the Lord, and which, by cherishing the affections, preserves from the passions and from self-will; and which, where its strength is rightly developed, has a power that, in spite of sin and disorder, awakens the conscience and engages the heart, keeping it away from evil and the direct power of Satan. For it is God’s appointment.

I know indeed that another power is required to deliver the heart from sin and to keep it from sin. Nature, even as God created it, does not give eternal life, nor does it restore innocence or purify the conscience. We may, by the energy of the Spirit, consecrate ourselves to God outside these relationships, renounce them even, if God should call us by more powerful obligations, as Christ

teaches us in the gospel. The rights of Christ over man lost by sin are sovereign, absolute, and complete. He has redeemed him; and the redeemed one is no longer his own, but belongs to Him who gave Himself for him. Where relationships exist, sin indeed has perverted everything, and corrupted the will; passions come in; but the relationships themselves are of God: woe to him who despises them as such! If grace has wrought and the new life exists, it acknowledges that which God has formed. It well knows that there is no good in man, it knows that sin has marred everything, but that which sin has marred is not itself sin. And where these relationships exist, the renunciation of self-will, death to sin, the bringing in of Christ, the operation of life in Him, restore their power; and if they cannot give back the character of innocence (lost for ever), they can make them a scene for the operations of grace, in which meekness, tenderness, mutual help, and self-denial, in the midst of the difficulties and sorrows which sin has introduced, lend them a charm and a depth (even as Christ did in every relationship) which innocence itself could not have presented. It is grace acting in the life of Christ in us which develops itself in them.

To be without natural affection is a sign of hopeless apostasy and estrangement from God, of the complete selfishness of the last days.

I am not drawing a false picture, or speaking poetically, as though the bright side were all; I only say that God has formed these relationships, and that whosoever fears God will respect them. Grace is requisite. They give occasion, through their intimacy itself, to all that is most painful, if grace does not act in them. The apostle warns us here of this danger. If the Lord is the bond in

them, if our still closer union with Him forms the strength of our natural relationships, then grace reigns here as elsewhere; and, to those who stand in these relationships, they become a scene for the lovely display of the life of Christ.

It will be observed how the apostle consequently introduces Christ into them, and especially in regard to those who are subject in them, wives and children; in order to sanctify, by so exalted a motive, the obedience suited to their position. He does this still more where the tie is not of nature but one which has its origin in a sinful world—and from sin itself—that between slaves and their masters. Grace does not set itself to change the state of the world and of society, but to lead souls to heaven by renewing them after the image of God. I doubt not that it has very much altered for the better the social condition of man; because, through bringing the conscience immediately before the only true God whom it has revealed in His own perfections, and establishing by its authority that of the natural relationships in the human family, grace has had its effect upon that conscience even where the heart was not converted, and has furnished it with a rule in that which regards morality. But Christianity, as to its own doctrine, treats the world as alienated from God and lying in evil—man as the child of wrath, and lost.

Christ, the Son of God (who if He had been received could have put all things right, and who will hereafter by His kingdom establish righteousness and peace), was rejected by the world, and the friendship of the world is enmity against God. The state of man is treated in the gospel in a deeper way than in regard to his social condition. It is viewed with reference to the soul’s

connection with God, and consequently with that which is eternal. God imparts a new life unto us, in order that we may enjoy those new relationships with Himself which redemption has gained for us. Now as Christ, while living, was the expression of the love and the omnipotent goodness of God in the midst of a fallen creation, so, being now rejected by the world (which thus condemned itself), Christ, who dwells, by His grace, in the heart of one who has received life, becomes to that heart a source of happiness in communion with the love of God, which lifts it up and sets it above circumstances, be they what they may. The slave, in possessing Christ, is free in heart; he is the freed man of God Himself. The master knows that he himself has a Master, and the relationship in which he finds himself takes the form of the grace and love that reigns in the heart of him who in it exercises his authority.

But as I have said, to the poor slave Christ is especially presented as a resource. He may serve his master, whether a good or bad one, with faithfulness, meekness, and devotedness; because in so doing he serves the Lord Himself, and is conscious that he does so. He will have his reward there where nothing is forgotten that is done to glorify Christ, and where masters and slaves are all before Him who has no respect of persons.

Two principles act in the heart of the christian slave: his conscience in all his conduct is before God; the fear of God governs him, and not his master’s eye. And he is conscious of his relationship to Christ, of the presence of Christ, which sustains and lifts him above everything. It is a secret which nothing can take from him, and which has power over everything, because it is within and on high—Christ in him, the hope of glory. Yes, how

admirably does the knowledge of Christ exalt everything that it pervades; and with what consoling power does it descend into all that is desolate and cast down, all that groans, all that is humbled in this world of sin!

Three times in these two verses, while holding their conscience in the presence of God, the apostle brings in the Lord, the Lord Christ, to fill the hearts of these poor slaves, and make them feel who it was to whom they rendered service. Such is Christianity.

The apostle ends his epistle with some important general exhortations. He desires that the saints should continue through prayer in communion with God, and in the sense of their dependence on Him, conscious of His nearness to them, and of His readiness to hear them. For that which speaks to the heart for our walk is not enough; the soul must know its own relations with God, exercising itself in those relations; and it must receive directly from Him that which assures it of His love. There must be perseverance in this. We are in conflict with evil, which has a hold upon our own hearts if we are without the strength of God. We must therefore commune with God. We must watch therein with settled purpose of heart, not merely as an occasional thing: any one can cry out when he is in need. But the heart separated from the world and all that is of it occupies itself with God, with all that regards the glory of His name, according to the measure in which we are concerned in it. The conflict is carried on with a tender and freed spirit, having only His glory as the object, both in the assembly and in the individual walk. But thus one understands that God works, and that He does not forsake us, and thanksgiving is always mingled with the prayers we address to Him.

Paul felt his dependence on this blessing, and he asked for a share also in their prayers, that God might open his mouth, and that he might proclaim the gospel as he ought to do.

Now we are in a hostile world, in which hostility is easily awakened where it does not already exist openly, and in which offence is quickly taken at things wherein perhaps we neither saw nor intended evil. We must take away the occasion even from those that seek it, and walk in wisdom with respect to them that are without.

How clearly the within and the without are here distinguished! Those within, whom God acknowledges, His family. His assembly—they are His own. Those without, they are the world, those who are not joined to the Lord. The distinction is plainly marked, but love is active towards them that are without, and, being itself in the enjoyment of communion with God, it is careful to do nothing that might prevent others from enjoying it.

But there was something more: they were to redeem the time. The natural man, taken up with his own affairs, and disinclined to serious things, gave christian love little opportunity to set grace and truth before him and make him care for his own soul, thus serving the Lord and using time in His name. The heart of man cannot always escape the influence of surrounding circumstances, which bear witness to his heart and conscience that he is under the dominion of sin, and already eating its bitter fruits here below—circumstances which bring to his conscience the remembrance of a too much forgotten God, which speak with the mighty voice of sorrow to a broken heart, glad at least to have a resource in God when his hand is

pierced by the broken reed on which he leaned. God Himself acts upon man by these circumstances, and by every circumstance of life. One who is walking with the Lord knows how to avail himself of them. Satan may indeed deceive a man, but he cannot prevent God at all times from speaking to the heart. It is a happy thing so to walk with God that He can use us as His voice, when He would thus speak to poor sinners. Our speech ought always to be the expression of this separation from evil, this power of the presence of God which keeps us inwardly apart from it, so as to make that power felt by others; and that, in all the questionings which arise in the heart of man, wandering out of the way in confusion and darkness, and even leading others astray thereby, we may know how to give an answer which comes from the light and conveys light.

Tychicus was to carry the testimony of the interest which the apostle took in the welfare of the Colossians, and of his confidence in their interest in him. Paul bears witness to the love of others, and to their concern also in the progress of the gospel and the prosperity of the faithful.

Marcus, who had formerly drawn back from the toils of the work, receives a testimony here on the apostle's part and a still better one later (2 Tim. 4:11), for he had made himself useful to the apostle himself. Such is grace. The secret of the interest Barnabas took in him comes out here: he was nearly related to him. This dear servant of God was from Cyprus too. He went there and took Mark with him. The flesh and Judaism find their way everywhere. The power of the Spirit of God is requisite to raise us above, and set us beyond, their influence.

Demas receives no especial testimony. The apostle conveys his greetings, but is silent as to himself. Only in the epistle to Philemon is he named as a fellow-labourer of the apostle. Afterwards he forsook Paul. He was a brother: the apostle admits his claim but says nothing; he had nothing to say. “And Demas,” for Paul’s style is terribly cold.

We may observe that the epistle to the Ephesians was written at the same time, and sent by this same Tychicus. The one “from Laodicea” is, I doubt not, one that they were to receive from that assembly, written by Paul, and by which the saints at Colosse were to profit; possibly the epistle to the Ephesians, which he may have had communicated to the Laodiceans. Be this as it may, all that is said is that it was one of which the assembly at Laodicea were in possession, and by no means that it was directly addressed to them: rather the contrary. It is very possible that a letter, or a hundred letters, may have been written by Paul to others, which it was not in the purposes of God to preserve for the universal assembly: but here there is no proof that a letter had been written to the Laodiceans. Tychicus was the bearer of two: he may have been the bearer of three, one of which differed only in some details of application which might serve to confirm the Colossians without being in the main another divine communication for other days; but, I repeat, it does not appear to be so from that which is said here. It might be said, a letter “from Laodicea,” because it was there, instead of a letter to Laodicea; but it is not the usual mode of expression. We have seen that the letter to the Ephesians is another communication of the Spirit of God. It has been preserved for us. We do not know whether that from Laodicea was the same,

communicated by them to the Christians of that city; or another, which they were to send to the Colossians (an assembly in their vicinity), and which—adding nothing to the divine relations—has not been preserved for us.

It appears that Christians were not very numerous at Laodicea. The apostle salutes the brethren there. There were some who assembled in the house of one Nymphas; they were not in a case to have a letter addressed to them in particular: still the apostle does not forget them. But that which he says here is an almost certain proof that the apostle had not addressed any epistle to them. He would not have sent greetings through the Colossians to the brethren in Laodicea, if at the same time he had written a special epistle to the latter. The case is plain enough: there were brethren at Laodicea, but not in great numbers, and not in that distinct position which gave rise to an epistle. But this little assembly in the house of Nymphas was not to be forgotten; it should profit by the epistles addressed to other assemblies more considerable than itself, and whose condition required an epistle, or gave occasion to write one, which epistles were transmitted to Laodicea, according to the apostle’s order.

With regard to the epistle to the Colossians, it is not a supposition. The apostle commands them expressly to have it read in the assembly at Laodicea. The latter had also received another epistle from some other assembly, and the Colossians were to profit by it in the same manner. The two assemblies, which were near each other, were mutually to enjoy the spiritual favours that were granted them.

The apostle does not forget individuals even. Archippus receives a solemn exhortation to take heed to the ministry which the Lord had committed to him, and to fulfil his service. The apostle had not seen these assemblies (chap. 2:1).

1 How painful it is to see this beloved church taken afterwards as an example of the first love being lost! But all tends to the end.

2 The name of Timotheus is not found in the address to the saints at Ephesus.

3 It is one of the deceits of the heart that, when we really know God's will quite well, we go to ask advice of one no more spiritual than ourselves.

4 There are three measures given of the Christian's walk in this form: worthy of God who has called us to His own kingdom and glory; worthy of the Lord, here; and worthy of the vocation with which we are called, that is, the Holy Ghost dwelling in the church, Ephesians 2; developed as it is in the end of chapter 3.

5 The antecedent is, I think, here the Lord, but the Lord and God are greatly merged in one thought.

6 Take especial notice here, that it is not said "will make us meet," as a thing yet to be done, and in which we make progress.

7 We shall also see, further on, that the starting-point is somewhat different, and, though Ephesian ground is partially referred to, brings in man as he is found living in sin, and less absolutely to God, who finds him already dead in sins, and creates him according to His own counsels. But of this hereafter. Further, in Ephesians 1:6 our place is full grace in Christ; in Colossians 1 it is

present actual deliverance from the power of darkness and translation into the kingdom of the Son of His love—not grace or favour in the Beloved.

8 This belongs to the principle mentioned above. In Ephesians, all is seen from the point of view of God's eternal counsels before evil existed, the good which He purposed in Himself, although redemption was necessary when evil had come in, and the glory of God Himself and the basis of our glory in the accomplishment of them, was made good in it. In Colossians man in evil is the object of grace.

9 One of these pre-eminences depends on His divine rights as Creator, the other on His work and on the power displayed in His humanity in the act of resurrection. He holds all as man and all by divine power; but in some sort it may be said that one part of His glory depends on His divinity, the other on His victory as man.

10 Indeed added to the four as supplementary.

11 When the Christian is viewed as in Christ, there is no "if": we are in Him. When he is viewed as a pilgrim here, we are on the road to actual glory, and have to reach the goal, and here "if" comes in, and danger, and the need of being kept. But then we have the fullest assurance that we shall be kept and never perish, and be confirmed to the end, and the good work completed. Thus dependence on God is maintained in the saved, and confidence in His faithfulness.

12 Note here how clear and full the statement is: verse 14, redemption and forgiveness; verse 21, reconciliation with God; verse 13, deliverance and introduction into the kingdom; verse 12, we are made meet to be

partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. All this we have, and so are called to walk worthy of the Lord.

13 It is not a question here as to the dates of the books, but of the circle' of subjects. The law, the kingdom, the Person of Christ, redemption and the ways of God, had already been brought out; the doctrine of the assembly was then to be revealed, in order to make the communications of God complete as to their subjects.

14 I have already remarked that the Gentiles are especially in view in the Colossians, not the union of Jew and Gentile in one.

15 There were some very beautiful legends, embracing partial truths, in the Gnostic system; but they had lost God and truth, and reality of conscience before God.

16 These expressions relate to the double character of Christ already set before us in chapter 1. They shew us what we have in Christ in a positive way, as that which follows applies it to everything here below which would prevent our enjoying it. In Christ is the fulness of the Godhead, the object of our delight, in whom we possess all things. We have also in Him a position above all creation, in the perfection which has placed Christ there. We are completed in Him who is the Head of all principality and of all power. As regards the phraseology, the change of a word, to one not however better in itself, shews the mind of the apostle. In Him dwelleth all the completeness of the Godhead bodily; and we are complete in Him.

17 Some do not connect "risen "with baptism. If so, I apprehend the passage must be read thus: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the

circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism; in whom also ye are risen together [meaning with Christ] through faith," etc. Baptism clearly signifies death, and it is not the baptising but the coming out of the water which can be applied to resurrection. The giving of life is in no way the sense of baptism even as a figure, but leaving the life of Adam by death (the death of Christ) and entrance through that gate into a wholly new place and position.

18 These applications flow from chapter 2:11, 12. It is to be remarked that Romans from chapter 5:12 treats of death to sin, in which man (as child of Adam) was alive. In Ephesians man is reckoned as dead in sins as towards God. Colossians takes up both: chapter 2:11, 12 follows them out, adding resurrection with Christ. Verse 13 follows Ephesian doctrine. Chapters 2:20, 3:1, follow on chapter 2:11, 12, and we have the putting off of the old and putting on of the new man.

19 Although this word has the appearance of learning and of not being scriptural, this is not the case. Science, falsely so called, of which the apostle speaks elsewhere, is in Greek "gnosis" whence this presumptuous and corrupting philosophy was called "Gnosticism," and its votaries "Gnostics." It plays an immense part in the history of the church, with which I have nothing to do here. But its principles are frequently found in the New Testament, brought forward by the apostles in order to combat them. The Jews had largely fallen into the notion of a mediatorial work of angels, though not in the form exactly of Gnostic philosophy.

20 This was working in the apostle's days; Paul withstood it in the energy of the Holy Ghost. After his

departure that power was gone. The historical church never had the two great fundamental principles of Christianity, perfection in Christ ("by one offering he hath perfected for ever), and the presence and leading power of the Holy Ghost down here. These were supplanted by sacraments and the clergy.

21 Hence we have no justification in Ephesians. It treats of a new creation.

22 This difference is of deep interest, and brings out the character of the epistle to the Ephesians in a remarkable way—an epistle in which everything is influenced by the high point of view taken by the Spirit, and flows from the original and eternal counsels of God, and from His operation to bring those counsels to perfection—the settled purposes of His own heart. He desires to have—He creates—something in order to shew forth the immense riches of His grace. He has taken the dead and the lost: but they are only the objects of His operations, suited to make these manifest on account of their own condition. He does not work upon the nature of man, because it is contrary to His own, in order to destroy this contrariety. He quickens from the dead, and creates. In Colossians the death of the old man is spoken of, which it was necessary to take into consideration. God be praised, we are entitled to view it as already dead, because Christ has died for us. I may add here to that which I have said of the Holy Ghost, that, when the apostle speaks in Colossians of the power of hope in us, he does not mention the earnest of the Spirit. It is still Christ in us, the hope of glory. Throughout it is Christ, and Christ as life.

23 With this difference between the actings of the Spirit, and the existence of the new life, is connected the liberty of the soul. When we are born of God, we have necessarily a taste for holiness; love acts in us; we take pleasure in the righteousness of God. But, by virtue of these sentiments, although my heart appreciates love in God, and this love attracts me and inspires me with a measure of confidence, yet my conscience condemns me, I feel that I am not that which I love. I am under the law, and uncertain of my relationship with God. When I have learnt the value of Christ's blood, that He is my righteousness, the Holy Ghost dwelling and acting in me gives me the sense of my relationship with God. I have the consciousness of it in my soul, and the Holy Ghost bears witness of it. There is liberty.

24 It is a very different thing from dying to sin. This supposes evil in the thing that dies (save of course in the case of Christ who did it for those who had); whereas putting to death is an act of power in that which is good —the new man.

25 These three form the whole character of evil in man: generally, violence and corruption, the last taking the twofold form of lust and falsehood. So, before the flood, the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. Falsehood is Satan's form of corruption, and violence also characterises him. The Lord declares him to be a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). Man adds the lust because of flesh.

26 Note here the difference of the corresponding phrase in Ephesians. There the Christian is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. Here it is the new apprehensions of the divine life which knows God. It is

our state, not God’s creative act. Not that this contradicts the Ephesian view; on the contrary, “renewed “here is another word from Ephesians. It is that which is wholly new, never was there before. In Ephesians “renewed “is what is kept fresh and new.

27 Remark here how patience and graciousness and longsuffering characterise the Christian. It is remarkable how this is the case everywhere. So must it be in a world like this. So was it in Christ. So in I Corinthians 13 the traits of charity are all subjective and of this character. Not that that is a definition of charity, but it is characteristic of it. Where these traits are wanting, charity is.

28 It is simpler to put the stop after “one another,” and only a comma before “teaching.”

1 Thessalonians

We find in the epistles to the Thessalonians, and especially in the first (for in the second it was already needful to guard that freshness from the perfidious attacks of the enemy), the condition and the hope of the Christian as such in this world in all its freshness. These two epistles are the first that Paul wrote, unless we except that to the Galatians, the date of which is uncertain. Already long occupied with the work, it is only when this work was considerably advanced, that in watching over it he guards it by means of his writings—writings as we have seen, various in character, according to the state of the churches, and according to the divine wisdom which, by this means, deposited in the scriptures that which would be necessary for all ages.

Newly converted, the Christians at Thessalonica suffered much from the persecution of the world—a persecution which the Jews of that place had already previously stirred up against Paul himself. Happy at the gracious work there, and rejoicing in the state of his dear children in the faith (a testimony to which was borne everywhere, even by the world), the apostle opens his heart; and the Holy Ghost sets forth by his mouth what that christian condition was upon the earth which was the source of his joy in the case of the Thessalonians; and what the hope which threw its light upon the believer’s existence, shining around him through his whole life, and illuminating his path in the wilderness. In a word the christian character is unfolded to our eyes with all its motives and its joys, and that in

connection with the testimony of God and the hope which is our strength in bearing it.

We all know that the doctrine of the coming of Christ, which universally accompanies the work of the Spirit that attaches our hearts to Him in the first spring of a new life, is specially presented to us in these two epistles. And it is not merely formally taught as a doctrine; it is linked with every spiritual relationship of our souls, it is displayed in all the circumstances of the Christian's life. We are converted in order to wait for Him. The joy of the saints in the fruits of their labours is realised in His presence. It is at the coming of Christ that holiness has all its value, its measure being seen in that which is then manifested. It is the consolation when Christians die. It is the unexpected judgment of the world. It is unto the coming of Christ that God preserves His own in holiness, and blameless. We shall see these points set forth in detail in the different chapters of the first epistle. We only point them out here. In general we shall find that personal relationships, and the expectation of His appearing, have a remarkable and enlivening freshness in this epistle in every respect. The Lord is present to the heart—is its object; and christian affections spring up in the soul, causing the fruits of the Spirit to abound.

In these two epistles only is an assembly said to be "in God the Father," that is to say, planted in this relationship, having its moral existence—its mode of being—in it. The life of the assembly developed itself in the communion that flowed from this relationship. The Spirit of adoption characterises it. With the affection of little children the Thessalonians knew the Father. Thus John says, when speaking of the little children in Christ,

“I write unto you because ye have known the Father.” It is the first introduction into the position of liberty in which Christ has placed us—liberty before God and in communion with Him. Precious position! to be as children to One who loves as a Father, with all the liberty and tender affection of that relationship, according to divine perfection. For here it is not the adaptation of Christ’s human experience to the wants in which He acquired it (precious as that grace is); it is our introduction into the unmingled enjoyment of the light, and of the divine affections displayed in the character of the Father. It is our communion, tender and confiding but pure, with Him whose love is the source of all blessing. Nor do I doubt that, freshly brought out of heathenism as the Thessalonians were, the apostle refers to their knowledge of the one true God the Father in contrast with their idols.

The apostle, in declaring (as was his custom) that which he felt respecting them—the aspect in which they appeared to his heart and mind, speaks neither of gifts, as to the Corinthians, nor of the grand features of an exaltation that embraced the Lord and all saints, as to the Ephesians and even to the Colossians (with the addition of that which their state required); nor of the brotherly affection and fellowship of love which the Philippians had manifested in their connection with himself; nor of a faith that existed apart from his labours, and in communion with which he hoped to refresh himself, adding to it that which his abundant gifts enabled him to impart to them, as he writes to the Romans whom he had not yet seen.

Here it is the life itself of the Christian in its first fresh impressions, in its intrinsic qualities, as it developed

itself by the energy of the Holy Ghost on earth, the life of God here below in them, which he remembers in his prayers with so much satisfaction and joy. Three great principles, he tells the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13) form the basis, and ever abide as the foundation of this life—faith, hope and love. Now these three were the powerful and divine motives of the life of the Thessalonians. This life was not merely a habit; it flowed, in its outward activities, from immediate communion with its source. These activities were quickened and maintained by divine life, and by keeping the eye constantly fixed upon the object of faith. There was work, and labour, and endurance. There were the same in Ephesus, as we see it in Revelation 2. But here it was a work of faith, labour undertaken by love, endurance fed by hope. Faith, hope, and love are, we have seen, the springs of Christianity in this world. The work, the labour, the endurance continued at Ephesus, but ceased to be characterised by these great and mighty principles. The habit continued, but the communion was wanting. They had forsaken their first love.

The first to the Thessalonians is the expression of the living power in which the assembly is planted: Ephesus, in Revelation 2, of its first departure from that state.

May our work be a work of faith, drawing its strength, its existence even, from our communion with God our Father! May it be, each moment, the fruit of the realisation of that which is invisible, of the life which lives in the certainty, the immutable certainty, of the word! May it thus bear the impress of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, and be a testimony to it.

May our labour in service be the fruit of love, not performed merely as duty and obligation, although it is this, if we know that it is before us to be done!

May the patience that we must have, in order to go through this wilderness, be, not the necessity we feel because the path is before us, but an endurance sustained by the hope that belongs to our view of Jesus by faith, and that is waiting for Him!

These principles, faith, hope, and love, form our character as Christians:29 but it cannot, and ought not to, be formed in us without having objects. Accordingly the Spirit presents them here. They have a twofold character. The heart rests by faith in Jesus, waits for Him, counts upon Him, links itself with Him in its walk. He has walked here below, He represents us in heaven, He watches over us as the good Shepherd. He loves His own; He nourishes and cherishes them: our faith and our hope keep Him always in view. The conscience is before God our Father; it is not in the spirit of fear: there is no uncertainty as to our relationship. We are the children of a Father who loves us perfectly; but we are before God. His light has authority and power in the conscience: we walk in the sense that His eye is upon us, in love but upon us. And light makes everything manifest. It judges all that might weaken the sweet and peaceful realisation of the presence of God, and our communion with Jesus, and our confidence in Him, the intimacy of the intercourse between our souls and the Lord. These two principles are of all importance for abiding peace, for the progress of our souls. Without them the soul flags. The one sustains confidence, the other keeps us in the light with a good conscience. Without the latter, faith (not to say more) loses its

liveliness; without the former, the conscience becomes legal, and we lose spiritual strength, light and ardour.

The apostle reminds them also of the means used by God to produce this condition, that is, the gospel, the word, brought in power and in much assurance to the soul by the Holy Ghost. The word had power in their heart—came to it as the word of God; the Spirit Himself revealed Himself in it, giving the consciousness of His presence; and the consequence of this was the full assurance of the truth in all its power, in all its reality. The apostle's life, his whole conduct, confirmed the testimony which he bore—formed a part of it. Accordingly (it is always the case) the fruit of his labours answered in character to him who laboured; the Christianity of the Thessalonians resembled that of Paul. It was like the walk of the Lord Himself whom Paul followed so closely. It was "in much affliction," for the enemy could not bear so plain a testimony, and God granted this grace to such a testimony, and "with joy of the Holy Ghost."

Happy testimony to the power of the Spirit working in the heart! When this is so, everything becomes testimony to others. They see that there is in Christians a power of which they are ignorant, motives which they have not experienced, a joy which they may scoff at but which they do not possess; a conduct which strikes them, and which they admire, although they do not follow it; a patience which shews the impotence of the enemy in striving against a power that endures everything, and that rejoices in spite of all his efforts. What can we do with those who allow themselves to be killed without becoming less joyful, nay, whom it makes more so; who are above all our motives when left to

themselves, and who, if oppressed, possess their souls in perfect joy in spite of all our opposition; and who are unconquered by torments, finding in these only an occasion for bearing a stronger testimony that Christians are beyond our power? At peace, life is all of it a testimony; death, even in torture, is still more so. Such is the Christian, where Christianity exists in its true power, in its normal condition according to God—the word (of the gospel) and the presence of the Spirit, reproduced in the life, in a world estranged from God.

Thus it was with the Thessalonians; and the world, in spite of itself, became an additional witness to the power of the gospel. An ensample to believers in other places, they were the subject of report and conversation to the world, which was never weary of discussing this phenomenon, so new and so strange, of people who had given up all that governed the human heart, all to which it was subject, and worshipped one only living and true God, to whom even the natural conscience bore testimony. The gods of the heathen were the gods of the passions, not of the conscience. And this gave a living reality, an actuality, to the position of Christians and to their religion. They waited for His Son from heaven.

Happy indeed were those Christians whose walk and whole existence made of the world itself a witness for the truth, who were so distinct in their confession, so consistent in their life, that an apostle did not need to speak of that which he had preached, of that which he had been among them. The world spoke of it for him and for them.

A few words on the testimony itself, which, simple as it may be, is of great importance, and contains principles

of great moral depth. It forms the basis of the whole life, and of all the christian affections also, that are unfolded in the epistle, which, besides this development, contains only a special revelation of the circumstances and the order of the coming of Christ to call His people to Himself, and of the difference between that event and the day of the Lord to judge the world, although this latter follows on the former.

That which the apostle points out, as the testimony borne by the faithful walk of the Thessalonians, contained three principal subjects: 1st, they had forsaken their idols to serve the living and true God; 2nd, they were waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He had raised from among the dead; 3rd, the Son was a safeguard from the wrath which was to be revealed.

An immense fact—simple but of vast import—characterises Christianity. It gives us a positive object; and this object is nothing less than God Himself. Human nature may discover the folly of that which is false. We scorn false gods and graven images; but we cannot get beyond ourselves, we cannot reveal anything to ourselves. One of the most renowned names of antiquity is pleased to tell us, that all would go well if men followed nature (it is manifest that they could not rise above it); and, in fact, he would be in the right if man were not fallen. But to require man to follow nature is a proof that he is fallen, that he has degraded himself below the normal state of that nature. He does not follow it in the walk that suits its constitution. All is in disorder. Self-will carries him away, and acts in his passions. Man has forsaken God, and has lost the power and centre of attraction that kept him in his place and everything in his own nature in its place. Man cannot

recover himself, he cannot direct himself; for, apart from God, there is nothing but self-will that guides man. There are many objects that furnish occasion for the acting of the passions and the will; but there is no object which, as a centre, gives him a regular, constant, and durable moral position in relationship with that object, so that his character should bear its stamp and value. Man must either have a moral centre, capable of forming him as a moral being, by attracting him to itself and filling his affections, so that he shall be the reflex of that object; or he must act in self-will, and then he is the sport of his passions; or, which is the necessary consequence, he is the slave of any object that takes possession of his will. A creature, who is a moral being, cannot subsist without an object. To be self-sufficing is the characteristic of God.

The equilibrium which subsisted in the unconsciousness of good and evil is lost. Man no longer walks as man, having nothing in his mind outside his normal condition, outside that which he possessed; not having a will, or, which comes to the same thing, having a will that desired nothing more than it possessed, but that gratefully enjoyed all that was already appropriated to its nature, and especially the companionship of a being like himself, a help who had his own nature, and who answered to his heart—blessing God for everything.

Now man wills. While he has lost that which formed the sphere of his enjoyment, there is in him an activity which seeks, which is become unable to rest without aiming at, something farther; which, has already, as will, thrown itself into a sphere that it does not fill, in which it lacks intelligence to apprehend all that is there and power to realise even that which it desires. Man, and all

that has been his, no longer suffices man as enjoyment. He still needs an object. This object will either be above or below the man. If it be below, he degrades himself below himself; and it is this indeed which has taken place. He no longer lives according even to nature (as he to whom I have alluded says), a state which the apostle has described in the beginning of the epistle to the Romans with all the horrors of the plain truth. If this object be above himself and below God, there is still nothing to govern his nature, nothing that puts him morally in his place. A good being could not take this place to exclude God from it. If a bad object gains it, he becomes to the man a god, who shuts out the true God, and degrades man in his highest relationship—the worst of all degradations. This too has taken place. And since these beings are but creatures, they only can govern man by that which exists, and by that which acts upon him. This is to say, they are the gods of his passions. They degrade the idea of the Divinity: they degrade the practical life of humanity into slavery to the passions (which are never satisfied, and which invent evil when they are surfeited with excess in that which is natural to them) and are thus left without resource. Such in fact was the condition of man under Paganism.

Man, and above all, man having knowledge of good and evil, should have God for his object; and as an object that his heart can entertain with pleasure, and on which his affections can be exercised: otherwise he is lost. The gospel—Christianity—has given him this. God, who fills all things, who is the source of, in whom is centred, all blessing, all good—God, who is all love, who has all power, who embraces everything in His knowledge, because everything (except the forsaking of Himself) is

but the fruit of His mind and will—God has revealed Himself in Christ to man, in order that his heart, occupied with Him, with perfect confidence in His goodness, may know Him, may enjoy His presence, and reflect His character.

The sin and misery of man have but lent occasion to an infinitely more complete development of what this God is, and of the perfection of His nature, in love, in wisdom, and in power. But we are here considering only the fact, that He has given Himself to man for an object. Nevertheless, although the misery of man has but given room for a much more admirable revelation of God, yet God Himself must have an object worthy of Himself to be the subject of His purposes, and in order to unfold all His affections. This object is the glory of His Son—His Son Himself. A being of an inferior nature could not have been this to Him, although God can glorify Himself in His grace to such a one. The object of the affections, and the affections that are exercised with regard to it, are necessarily correlative. Thus God has displayed His sovereign and immense grace with regard to that which was the most wretched, the most unworthy, the most necessitous; and He has displayed all the majesty of His being, all the excellence of His nature, in connection with an object in whom He could find all His delight, and exhibit all that He is in the glory of His nature. But it is as man—marvellous truth in the eternal counsels of God! —that this object of God the Father's delight has taken His place in this glorious revelation by which God makes Himself known to His creatures. God has ordained and prepared man for this. Thus the heart that is taught by the Spirit knows God as revealed in this immense grace, in the love that comes down from the throne of God to

the ruin and misery of the sinner; he finds himself, in Christ, in the knowledge and in the enjoyment of the love which God has for the object of His eternal delight, who also is worthy of being so; of the communications by which He testifies that love (John 17:7, 8); and finally, of the glory which is its public demonstration before the universe. This latter part of our ineffable blessedness is the subject of Christ's communications at the end of John's Gospel (chaps. 14, 16, and, in particular 17).30 From the moment that the sinner is converted and believes the gospel, and (to complete his state, I must add) is sealed with the Holy Ghost, now that the blessed Lord has wrought redemption, he is introduced—as to the principle of his life— into this position, into these relationships with God. He is perhaps but a child; but the Father whom he knows, the love into which he has entered, the Saviour on whom his eyes are opened, are the same whom he will enjoy when he shall know as he is known. He is a Christian; he is turned from idols to God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

We may observe, that the subject here is not the power which converts, nor the source of life. Of these other passages speak clearly. Here it is the character of the life in its manifestation. Now this depends on its objects. Life is exercised and unfolded in connection with its objects, and thus characterises itself. The source from which it flows makes it capable of enjoying it; but an intrinsic life which has no object on which it depends is not the life of a creature. Such life as that is the prerogative of God. This shews the folly of those who would have a subjective life, as they say, without its having a positively objective character; for this subjective state depends on the object with which it is

occupied. It is the characteristic of God to be the source of His own thoughts without an object— to be, and to be self-sufficing (because He is perfection, and the centre and source of everything), and to create objects unto Himself, if He would have any without Himself. In a word, although receiving a life from God which is capable of enjoying Him, the moral character of man cannot be formed in him without an object that imparts it to him.

Now God has given Himself to us for an object, and has revealed Himself in Christ. If we occupy ourselves with God in Himself (supposing always that He had thus revealed Himself), the subject is too vast. It is an infinite joy; but in that which is simply infinite there is something wanting to a creature, although it is his highest prerogative to enjoy it. It is necessary to him on the one hand, in order that he may be in his place, and that God may have His place in regard to him, and on the other hand that which exalts him so admirably. It must be so; and it is the privilege given unto us, and given unto us in a priceless intimacy, for we are children, and we dwell in God, and God in us; but with this in itself there is a certain weight upon the heart in the sense of God alone. We read of “a far more exceeding and abundant weight31 of glory.” It must be so: His majesty must be maintained when we think of Him as God, His authority over the conscience. The heart—God has so formed it—needs something which will not lower its affections, but which may have the character of companion and friend, at least to which it has access in that character.

It is this which we have in Christ, our precious Saviour. He is an object near to us. He is not ashamed to call us

brethren. He has called us friends; all that He has heard from His Father He has made known to us. Is He then a means of our eyes being turned away from God? On the contrary, it is in Him that God is manifested, in Him that even the angels see God. It is He who, being in the bosom of the Father, reveals to us His God and Father in this sweet relationship, and as He knows Him Himself. And not only this, but He is in the Father, and the Father in Him, so that He who has seen Him has seen the Father. He reveals God to us, instead of turning us away from Him. In grace He has already revealed Him, and we wait for the revelation of glory in Him. Already also on the earth, from the moment that He was born, the angels celebrated the good pleasure of God in man, for the object of His eternal delight had become a man. And now He has accomplished the work which makes possible the introduction of others, of sinners, into the enjoyment with Himself of this favour of God. Once enemies, “we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”

It is thus that God has reconciled us to Himself. By faith thus knowing God, we “turn from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.” The living and true God is the object of our joyful service. His Son, whom we know, who knows us, who will have us to be where He is, who has identified us with His own glory and His glory with us, He who is a glorified man for ever and firstborn among many brethren, is the object of our expectation. We expect Him from heaven, for our hopes are there, and there the seat of our joy.

We have the infinity of a God of love, the intimacy and the glory of Him who has taken part in all our

infirmities, and, without sin, has borne all our sins. What a portion is ours!

But there was another side of the truth. Creatures are responsible; and, however great His love and His patience, God cannot allow evil nor contempt of His authority: if He did, all would be confusion and misery. God Himself would lose His place. There is a judgment; there is wrath to come. We were responsible; we have failed. How then shall we enjoy God and the Son in the way that I have spoken of?

Here comes in the application of the third truth of which the apostle speaks: “which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The work of Christ has perfectly sheltered us from this wrath; He took our place in responsibility on the cross to put away sin for us by the sacrifice of Himself.

These then are the three great elements of christian life. We serve the living and the true God, having forsaken our idols outward or inward. We expect Jesus for glory; for this sight of God makes us feel what this world is, and we know Jesus. As to our sins and our conscience, we are perfectly cleansed; we fear nothing. The life and walk of the Thessalonians was a testimony to these truths.

Having established these great principles, the apostle, with an open and overflowing heart, appeals to his whole walk among them as a proof of his having walked in the same spirit as in their own case he was rejoicing in. It was not that he exhorted others, while availing himself of their affection, for his own advantage. It was not that he encouraged them to endure afflictions, without having courage himself to undergo the same. Ill-

treated and insulted at Philippi, he was bold in God to renew his attacks on the kingdom of darkness at Thessalonica, and that with great energy. He had not used flattering words to win them; he had set the truth before them, as being himself the servant of God. He had worked with his own hands that he might not be burdensome to them. All was before God in the light and by the energy of the Holy Ghost, and in a spirit of devotedness; even as he desired that they should walk as they knew he had walked among them, as holily, justly, and unblamably; as also he had exhorted them, with all affection and tenderness, to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto His own kingdom and glory.

We see again in this expression the close relationship of the Christian, in his individual character, with God. He has his portion in God's own kingdom and glory, and his conduct should become such a position. Here it is his own position in relationship with God, as before it was his relationship with God and the Lord Jesus.

The apostle then speaks of the means by which this world of new thoughts was acquired by the Christian. It was that God had spoken to reveal Himself and His counsels. God had committed the gospel to Paul (chap. 2:4), and he had acted as being in the presence of God, and responsible to Him.

The Thessalonians also, on their part, had received the word, not as the word of Paul, but as the word of God Himself addressed to them by the mouth of Paul. It is interesting, as for us also a serious thought, to observe that (with regard to the manifestation of the power of God down here), although the work is of God, the fruit of His servants' labours answers to the character and

depth of that labour itself. Thus the bonds of grace are established, and communion; there is mutual understanding. The work manifests the workman. The labourer rejoices in that which his heart had desired for the souls that are the fruit of his labour; and these know how to appreciate the walk and the work of the labourer, acknowledging the power of grace in him who was the means of bringing them into this position; and the one and the others, knowing God, rejoice in the fellowship of His grace.

Paul was very largely with God in his own soul and in his work. The Thessalonians had in consequence received the word in the same power; and they, with him, were thus in communion with God according to that power and that intimacy.

We see here, in passing, the Jews deprived of this relationship with God, the remnant of that people received, and suffering from the enmity of the mass. The elect from among the Gentiles awakened, on their part, the hostility of their fellow-countrymen by the testimony which they bore against the prince of this world in their christian walk, and by their confession of a heavenly Christ—a Christ whom the world had rejected.

The religion of the Jews had become pure jealousy of others. The pretension to the exclusive possession of religious privileges —very precious when they enjoyed it with God as a testimony of His favour—was nothing but a spring of hatred, when God in the fulness of His sovereign grace chose to bless others who had a right to nothing. By this exclusive pretension they denied the rights of God, who had formerly chosen them as a people; they denied His grace, according to which He

acted towards sinners, and which would have been the source of better blessings for themselves. But meantime their refusal to come in had transferred the scene of our hopes and our joys from earth to heaven, where we know the Lord, and where He will remain until He comes to assert His claims over the earth. Before He asserts them, He will take us to Himself.

Meanwhile the word of God is the source of our confidence— the revelation of glory, of truth, and of love. It is mighty in them that believe. The Jews are set aside. By their opposition to grace towards the Gentiles, they had taken the position of enmity against God in grace, and wrath was come upon them to the uttermost. It was not yet executed; but they had put themselves in this position. It was not only that they had broken the law, they had already killed their prophets who were sent to them in grace; they had already slain the Christ, Jesus the Lord. Sovereign grace alone could bring in a remedy. This they resisted; because, according to that grace, God was good to the Gentiles, and granted to them, at the same time as to themselves, better privileges than those which they had forfeited. Wrath therefore was finally come upon them as a nation. Christians were now in the enjoyment of better privileges in place of the Jews.

It is not here the moment for explaining the future dealings of God with the remnant of that people. The apostle speaks here of the people, in order to shew that the only ones in relation with God were Christians— those who had received the word. It was the reception of the word by faith, and nothing else, which brought souls really into relationship with God. Hereditary privileges were found to be, in their nature, opposition to grace

and sovereignty, and thus to the character and rights of God Himself; for God is sovereign, and God is love.

The word reveals grace; it is obeyed by believing it. And, brought into relationship with God, the Christian walks in His communion and in His ways, and waits for the Son, in whom He has revealed Himself to men. This is the fruit of that which the Christian has received through believing—an efficacious principle of life, and a light from God for the way.

The apostle blessed God that it was thus with the Thessalonians; and, having made this point clear, he returns to the joy of his communion with them in the positive blessing which the revelation of God in their hearts by the word had brought them. He would gladly have seen them to enjoy this communion in intercourse with them face to face; but as long as it was by the word only that the knowledge of God was obtained— in a word by faith—as long as the Lord was absent, another result flowed from this fact; namely, that these joys were mingled with conflict—conflict however, which, although to the eye of man interrupting enjoyment, made it more sweet, more real, preserved its heavenly character, and made the Lord Himself, from whom they could not be separated, the centre, the common point in which hearts were united, with the consciousness that they were in the wilderness, and that they were awaiting a scene and a time in which evil and the enemy’s power would no longer be, but where Christ would be all. Joyful hope, holy happiness, powerful link of the heart to Christ! When He shall be all, our joy will be complete, and all saints will possess it. Paul wished to have seen them again, and had so even twice, but Satan hindered it. The time should come when he would fully enjoy both them

and his labour among them, by seeing them in full possession of glory at the coming of Christ.

In the apostle himself, when at Thessalonica, christian life was fully developed in love and in holiness. He had been among them in tenderness, as a mother cherishes her children; ready to impart not only the gospel to them, but even his own life, so dear were they to him. He had been at the same time holy and without blame in all his conduct. What energy of life and love springing up by the power of God, regardless of all the consequences save the blessing of the elect and the glory of God! This is true christian life. The heart, not filled with questionings through unbelief but strong in faith, counts on God in order to serve God. Thus love is free, beside oneself for God, prudent and full of consideration only for the good of others. And what bonds this creates! Persecution only hastens the work by compelling to go elsewhere, when perhaps the labourer would be tempted to enjoy the fruits of his labour in the society of those who had been blessed through him (compare chap. 2:2). Though absent, the apostle's heart was still bound to them; he remembered his beloved ones; he prayed for them; he blessed God for the grace bestowed on them; assuring himself with joy, when he thought of it, of their portion in glory as the elect of God (chap. 1:3, 4; 2:13).

The bond remained firm; and, the way to present enjoyment of personal communion being obstructed by the devices of Satan (by permission of God), his heart rose higher, and sought the full satisfaction of the want produced in it by love, in the moment when a Christ present in His power should have removed all obstacles and accomplished the purposes of God with respect to

the saints; when His love should have borne all its precious fruits in them; and when Paul and his dear children in the faith should enjoy together all that grace and the power of the Spirit should have wrought in them. Unable for the moment to satisfy the desires of his heart by seeing them, it was to that hour that Paul looked. And observe that, if he does so, it is because his heart was already filled with it for himself. The power of the Spirit, acting in accordance with the truth, always leads the heart to that hour. It impels the heart to labour in love in the midst of this world, causes thus the opposition of the darkness of this world to the light (whether on the part of man or of the prince of darkness) to be realised, and makes us always feel the need of that day of light, when evil shall no longer be present to hinder the happiness of the new man in his enjoyment of that which is good, in his communion with those dear to God, and, above all, in the enjoyment of the presence of his glorified Saviour, who has loved him, and who (for the exercise of his faith) is at present hidden from him.

It is He who is the source and object of all these affections, who sustains and nourishes them, who attracts them ever to Himself by His perfections and by His love, and, in the sorrows of the christian life, carries the heart onward thus to the day of our being with Himself, to the day of His coming, when the heart will be free to occupy itself with all that binds us to Him without interruption. This thought of His presence has the mastery, when the heart is fresh in the divine joy of redemption. We find this here. We are converted to wait for Him (chap. 1); we shall enjoy the communion of saints, and the fruit of our labours when He returns

(chap. 2); that day gives its force and its measure to our thoughts respecting holiness (chap. 3); it destroys the anguish of heart which would otherwise accompany the death of the saints (chap. 4); it is for that day we are kept (chap. 5). The coming of the Lord, the presence of Jesus, fills therefore the believer's heart, when life is springing up in its freshness—fills it with a joyous hope, the fulfilment of which shines bright before our eyes, there where all our desires will be accomplished.

To return to the end of chapter 2, the link which Satan sought to break by interrupting its enjoyment was but the rather strengthened by being connected with the coming of the Lord. The current of the Spirit, against which he had been allowed to set up this dike, though turned from its natural bed, could not be stopped, for its waters ever flow; they gushed out in waves that enriched all around them, taking their course towards that sea which contained the fulness of those waters and fed the source from which they sprang.

It should be observed here, that the special fruits of our labours are not lost; they are found again at the coming of Christ. Our chief personal joy is to see the Lord Himself and to be like Him. This is the portion of all saints; but there are particular fruits in connection with the work of the Spirit in us and by us. At Thessalonica the spiritual energy of the apostle had brought a number of souls to God and to wait for Jesus, and into a close union in the truth with Himself. This energy would be crowned at the coming of Christ by the presence of these believers in the glory as the fruit of his labours. God would thus crown the apostle's work by bearing a striking testimony to its faithfulness in the presence of all these saints in glory; and the love which had wrought

in Paul's heart would be satisfied by seeing its object in glory and in the presence of Jesus. They would be his glory and joy. This thought drew yet closer the bonds that united them, and comforted the apostle in the midst of his toils and sufferings.

Now this forced removal of the apostle as the chief labourer, without weakening the bond between him and the disciples, formed other links which would consolidate and strengthen the assembly, knitting it together by that which every joint supplied. This is connected (all things are but the instruments of the power and wisdom of God) with the circumstances of which the Acts of the Apostles give us the principal details.

After the persecutions excited by the Jews the apostle made a short stay at Thessalonica, and was then obliged to leave that city and go to Berea. Even there the Jews of Thessalonica followed him, and influenced those of Berea, so that the Berean brethren had to provide for his safety. The person to whom they committed him brought him to Athens; Silas and Timotheus remained at Berea for the moment, but soon at his command rejoined him at Athens. Meantime a violent persecution raged against the Christians at Thessalonica, a city of importance, in which, as it appears, the Jews had already exercised a considerable measure of influence over the heathen population—an influence that was undermined by the progress of Christianity, which the Jews in their blindness rejected.

The apostle, learning this state of things from Silas and Timotheus, was concerned at the danger his new converts ran in being shaken in faith by the difficulties

that beset their path while they were still young in the faith. His affection would not allow him to rest without putting himself in communication with them, and already from Athens he had sent Timotheus to inquire into their condition, and to establish their hearts by reminding them that while yet with them he had told them these things would happen. During his absence Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, where Timotheus again comforted him by the good tidings he brought from Thessalonica, and the apostle resumed his labours at Corinth with renewed energy and courage (see Acts 18:5).

On the arrival of Timotheus Paul wrote this letter. Timotheus had informed him of the good state of the Thessalonian Christians—that they held fast the faith, that they greatly desired to see the apostle, and that they walked together in love. In the midst of his sorrows, and of the opposition of men—in a word, of the afflictions of the gospel—the apostle's spirit is refreshed by these tidings. He is himself strengthened, for if the faith of the labourer is the means of blessing to souls, and in general the measure of the outward character of the work, the faith of the Christians who are the fruit of his labours, and who correspond to it, is in return a source of strength and encouragement to the labourer; even as their prayers are a great means of blessing to him.

Love finds in their spiritual welfare both its food and its joy; faith, that which sustains and strengthens it. The word of God is felt in it. "I live," says the apostle, "if ye stand fast in the Lord. What thanks," he adds, "can we render to God for you, for all the joy wherewith we rejoice for your sakes before God?" Beautiful and

affecting picture of the effect of the operation of the Spirit of God, delivering souls from the corruption of the world, and producing the purest affections, the greatest self-renunciation for the sake of others, the greatest joy in their happiness—divine joy, realised before God Himself, and the value of which was appreciated in His presence by the spiritual heart that abode in it, the heart which, on the part of that God of love, had been the means of its existence.

What a bond is the bond of the Spirit! How selfishness is forgotten, and disappears in the joy of such affections! The apostle, animated by this affection, which increased instead of growing weary by its exercise, and by the satisfaction it received in the happiness of others, desires so much the more, from the Thessalonians being thus sustained, to see them again; not now for the purpose of strengthening them, but to build upon that which was already so established, and to complete their spiritual instruction by imparting that which was yet lacking to their faith. But he is, and he ought to be, a labourer and not a master (God makes us feel this), and he depends entirely on God for his work, and for the edification of others. In fact years passed away before he saw the Thessalonians again. He remained a long time at Corinth, where the Lord had much people; he revisited Jerusalem, then all Asia Minor where he had laboured earlier; thence he went to Ephesus, where he abode nearly three years; and after that he saw the Thessalonians again, when he left that city to go to Corinth, taking his journey by the way of Macedonia, in order not to visit Corinth before the restoration of the Christians there to order.

“God himself”—it is thus that the apostle’s desire and his submission to the will of God expresses itself—“God himself direct our way unto you.” His desire is not vague. He refers to God as to his Father, the source of all these holy affections, Him who holds the place of Father to us, and orders all things with a view to the good of His children, according to that perfect wisdom which embraces all things and all His children at once. “Our God and Father himself,” the apostle says. But there is another consideration—not, assuredly, in opposition to this, for God is one, but which has another and less individual character: and he adds—“And our Lord Jesus Christ.” Christ is Son over God’s house, and besides joy and blessing and individual affections, there was the progress, the welfare, and the development of the whole assembly to be considered. These two parts of Christianity act assuredly upon each other.

Where the operation of the Spirit is full and unhindered, the well-being of the assembly and the individual affections are in harmony. If anything is lacking in the one, God uses the failure itself to act powerfully on the other. If the assembly as a whole is weak, individual faith is exercised in a special manner, and more immediately upon God Himself. There are no Elijahs and Elishas in the reign of Solomon. On the other hand the watchful care of the assembly by those divinely engaged in it is the true energy of its spiritual organisation, strengthens the life, and re-awakens the spiritual affections of its slumbering members. But the two things are different. Therefore the apostle adds to “our God and Father,” “and our Lord Jesus Christ,” who, as we have said, according to Hebrews 3, is Son over His house. It is a blessing that our path depends on the love

of a Father, who is God Himself, acting according to the tender affections expressed by that name; and, as to the well-being of the assembly, that it depends on the government of a Lord like Jesus, who loves it with a perfect love: and who, although He took such a place, is the God who created all things, the Man who has all power in heaven and on earth, to whom Christians are the objects of incessant and faithful care—care which He expends in order to bring the assembly finally unto Himself in glory according to the counsels of God.32 Such then was the apostle's first wish, and such were they with regard to whom he formed it. Meanwhile he must leave his beloved Thessalonians to the immediate care of the Lord on whom he depended (compare Acts 20:32). To that his heart turns. May God direct my way to come to you. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all." And his heart could present its affection for them, as the pattern of that which they ought to feel for others. This power of love maintains the heart in the presence of God, and makes it find its joy in the light of His presence, and earnestly desire that all saints may be in His presence, their hearts fitted for it and there. For God is love, and the exercise of love in the Christian's heart (fruit of the presence and the operation of the Spirit) is in fact the effect of the presence of God; and at the same time it makes us feel His presence, so that it keeps us before Him and maintains sensible communion in the heart. Love may suffer and thereby prove its strength, but we are speaking of the spontaneous exercise of love towards the objects which God presents to it.

Now, being thus the development of the divine nature in us, and the sustainment of our hearts in communion

with God Himself, love is the bond of perfectness, the true means of holiness, when it is real. The heart is kept, far away from the flesh and its thoughts, in the pure light of the presence of God, which the soul thus enjoys. For this reason the apostle prays, while waiting to give them more light, that the Lord would increase love in them, in order to establish their hearts unblamable in holiness before God even our Father in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. Here we find again the two great principles of which I spoke at the end of chapter 1: God in the perfection of His nature; and the Lord Jesus in the intimacy of His connection with us—God however as Father, and Jesus as Lord. We are before God, and Jesus comes with His saints. He has brought them to perfection; they are with Him, and thus before God known in the relationship of Father.

Observe also that everything refers to this hope: it was an actual and present expectation. If they were converted, it was to serve God and to wait for His Son from heaven. Everything related to that wondrous moment when He should come. That which holiness was would be demonstrated when they should be before God, and the saints would be with their Head; moreover manifested with Him in glory, even as then they should also fully enjoy the fruit of their labour, and the reward of love in the joy of all those whom they had loved.33 The scene which would be the consummation of the work is presented here in all its moral bearing. We are before God, in His presence, where holiness is demonstrated in its true character; we are there for perfect communion with God in the light, where the connection of holiness with His nature and with the manifestation of Himself is apparent; even as this

manifestation is in connection with the development of a nature in us, which by grace sets us in relationship with Him.

“Unblamable,” he says, “in holiness,” and in holiness “before God.” He is light. What immense joy, what power, through grace, in this thought, for the time present, to keep ourselves manifested before Him! But only love, known in Him, can do this.

But also we add “Our Father.” It is a known and real relationship, which has its own peculiar character, a relationship of love. It is not a thing to be acquired, and holiness is not the means of acquiring it. Holiness is the character of our relationship with God, inasmuch as we have received His nature as His children, and it is the revelation of the perfection of that nature in Him in love. Love itself has given us that nature, and has placed us in that relationship; practical holiness is its exercise in communion with God, having fellowship with Him in His presence according to the love which we thus know, that is, God Himself as He has revealed Himself towards us.

But the heart is not alone: there is companionship in this joy and in this perfection; and above all it is with Jesus Himself. He will come. He will be present, and not only He who is the Head, but all the saints with Him will be there also. It will be the accomplishment of the ways of God respecting those whom He had given to Jesus. We shall see Him in His glory, the glory which He has taken in connection with His coming for us. We shall see all the saints in whom He will be admired, and see them in the perfection which our hearts desire for them now.

Observe also that love makes us rise above the difficulties, the persecutions, the fears, which the enemy

seeks to produce. Occupied with God, happy in Him, this weight of affliction is not felt. The strength of God is in the heart; the walk is sensibly connected with the eternal happiness possessed with Him, and the affliction is felt to be but light and for a moment. Nor this only; we suffer for Christ's sake: it is joy with Him, it is intimacy of communion, if we know how to appreciate it, and all is invested with the glory and salvation that are found at the end—"at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

In reading this passage one cannot but observe the immediate and living way in which the Lord's coming is linked with daily practical life, so that the perfect light of that day is thrown upon the hourly path of the present time. By the exercise of love they were to be established in holiness before God at the coming of Christ. From one day to another, that day was looked for as the consummation and the only term they contemplated to the ordinary life of each day here below. How this brought the soul into the presence of God! Moreover, as I have already in part observed, they lived in a known relationship with God which gave room for this confidence. He was their Father; He is ours. The relationship of the saints to Jesus was equally known. The saints were "his saints." They were all to come with Him. They were associated with His glory. There is nothing equivocal in the expression. Jesus, the Lord, coming with all His saints, allows us to think of no other event than His return in glory. Then also will He be glorified in His saints, who will already have rejoined Him to be for ever with Him. It will be the day of their manifestation as of His.

The apostle then turns to the dangers that beset the Thessalonians in consequence of their former habits (and which were still those of the persons that surrounded them), habits in direct contradiction to the holy and heavenly joy of which he spoke. He had already shewn them how they were to walk and to please God. In this way he had himself walked among them (chap. 2:10). He would exhort them to a similar conduct with all the weight that his own walk gave him, even as he would desire their growth in love according to the affection he had for them (compare Acts 26:29). It is this which gives authority to the exhortation, and to all the words of a servant of the Lord.

The apostle takes up especially the subject of purity, for the pagan morals were so corrupt that impurity was not even accounted to be sin. It appears strange to us that such an exhortation should have been needful to such lively Christians as the Thessalonians; but we do not make allowance enough for the power of those habits in which persons have been brought up, and which become as it were a part of our nature and of the current of our thoughts, and for the action of two distinct natures under the influence of these, though the allowance or cultivation of one soon deadens the other. But the motives given here shew upon what entirely new ground, as regards the commonest morality, Christianity places us. The body was but as a vessel to be used at will for whatever service they chose. They were to possess this vessel, instead of allowing themselves to be carried away by the desires of the flesh; because they knew God. They were not to deceive their brethren in these things,34 for the Lord would take vengeance. God has called us to holiness: it is with Him that we have to

do; and if any one despised his brother, taking advantage of his feebleness of mind to encroach upon his rights in this respect, it would be to despise not man but God, who would Himself remember it, and who has given us His Spirit; and to act thus would be to despise that Spirit, both in one's self and in one's brother in whom He also dwells. He who was wronged in this way was not only the husband of a wife, he was the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost and ought to be respected as such. On what high ground Christianity places a man, and that in connection with our best affections!

As touching brotherly love—that new mainspring of their life—it was not necessary to exhort them: God Himself had taught them, and they were an example of love to all. Only let them abound in it even more and more; walking quietly, working with their own hands, so as to be in no man's debt, that in this respect also the Lord might be glorified.

Such were the apostle's exhortations. That which follows is an absolutely new revelation for their encouragement and consolation.

We have seen that the Thessalonians were always expecting the Lord. It was their near and immediate hope in connection with their daily life. They were constantly expecting Him to take them to Himself. They had been converted to wait for the Son of God from heaven. Now (from want of instruction) it appeared to them that the saints who had recently died would not be with them to be caught up. The apostle clears up this point, and distinguishes between the coming of Christ to take up His own, and His day, which was a day of judgment to the world. They were not to be troubled

with regard to those who had died in Christ35 as those who had no hope were troubled. And the reason which he gives for this is a proof of the strict connection of their entire spiritual life with the expectation of Christ's personal return to bring them into heavenly glory. The apostle, in comforting them with regard to their brethren who had lately died, does not say a word of the survivors rejoining them in heaven. They are maintained in the thought that they were still to look for the Lord during their lifetime to transform them into His glorious image (compare 2 Cor. 5 and 1 Cor. 15). An especial revelation was required to make them understand that those who had previously died would equally have their part in that event. Their part, so to speak, would resemble that of Christ. He has died, and He has risen again. And so will it be with them. And when He should return in glory, God would bring them—even as He would bring the others, that is, the living—with Him.

Upon this the apostle gives some more detailed explanation of the Lord's coming in the form of express revelation, shewing how they would be with Him so as to come with Him when He appears. The living will not take precedence of those who sleep in Jesus. The Lord Himself will come as the Head of His heavenly army, dispersed for a time, to gather them to Himself. He gives the word. The voice of the archangel passes it on, and the trumpet of God is sounded. The dead in Christ will rise first, that is to say, before the living go up. Then we who shall be alive and remain shall go with them, all together, in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So shall we be for ever with the Lord.

It was thus that the Lord Himself ascended; for in all things we are to be like Him—an important

circumstance here. Whether transformed or raised from the dead, we shall all go up in the clouds. It was in the clouds that He ascended, and thus we shall be ever with Him.

In this part of the passage, where he explains the details of our ascension to the Lord in the air, nothing is said of His coming down to the earth; it is our going up (as He went up) to be with Him.36 Neither, as far as concerns us, does the apostle go farther than our gathering together to be for ever with Him. Nothing is said either of judgment or of manifestation; but only the fact of our heavenly association with Him in that we leave the earth precisely as He left it. This is very precious. There is this difference: He went up in His own full right, He ascended; as to us, His voice calls the dead, and they come forth from the grave, and, the living being changed, all are caught up together. It is a solemn act of God's power, which seals the Christians' life and the work of God, and brings the former into the glory of Christ as His heavenly companions. Glorious privilege! Precious grace! To lose sight of it destroys the proper character of our joy and of our hope.

Other consequences follow, which are the result of His manifestation; but that is our portion, our hope. We leave the earth as He did, we shall for ever be with Him.

It is with these words that we are to comfort ourselves if believers die—fall asleep in Jesus. They shall return with Him when He shall be manifested; but, as regards their own portion, they will go away as He went, whether raised from the dead or transformed, to be for ever with the Lord.

All the rest refers to His government of the earth: an important subject, a part of His glory; and we also take part in it. But it is not our own peculiar portion. This is, to be with Him, to be like Him, and even (when the time shall come) to quit in the same manner as Himself the world which rejected Him, and which has rejected us, and which is to be judged.

I repeat it: to lose sight of this is to lose our essential portion. All lies in the words, “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” The apostle has here explained how this will take place.37 Remark here, that verses 15-18 are a parenthesis, and that chapter 5:1 follows on chapter 4:14; chapter 5 shewing what He will do when He brings the saints with Him according to chapter 4:14.

In this important passage then we find the Christian living in an expectation of the Lord, which is connected with his daily life and which completes it. Death then is only an accessory which may take place, and which does not deprive the Christian of his portion when his Master shall return. The proper expectation of the Christian is entirely separated from all which follows the manifestation of Christ, and which is in connection with the government of this world.

The Lord comes in Person to receive us to Himself; He does not send. With full authority over death, which He has conquered, and with the trump of God, He calls together His own from the grave; and these, with the living (transformed), go to meet Him in the air. Our departure from the world exactly resembles His own: we leave the world, to which we do not belong, to go to heaven. Once there, we have attained our portion. We are like Christ, we are for ever with Him, but He will

bring His own with Him, when He shall appear. This then was the true comfort in the case of a Christian's death, and by no means put aside the daily expectation of the Lord from heaven. On the contrary this way of viewing the subject confirmed it. The dead saint did not lose his rights by dying— by sleeping in Jesus; he should be the first object of his Lord's attention when He came to assemble His own. Nevertheless the place from which they go forth to meet Him is the earth. The dead should be raised—this was the first thing—that they might be ready to go with the others; and then from this earth all would depart together to be with Christ in heaven. This point of view is all-important, in order to apprehend the true character of that moment when all our hopes will be consummated. The Lord's coming again into this world assumes therefore a very different character from that of a vague object of hope to a believer as a period of glory. In chapter 5 the apostle speaks of it, but in order to distinguish between the position of Christians and that of the careless and unbelieving inhabitants of the earth. The Christian, alive and taught of the Lord, ever expects the Master. There are times and seasons; it is not needful to speak to him concerning them. But (and he knows it) the day of the Lord will come, and like a thief in the night, but not for him: he is of the day; he has part in the glory which will appear in order to execute judgment on the unbelieving world. Believers are the children of light; and this light, which is the judgment of unbelievers, is the expression of the glory of God— a glory which cannot endure evil, and which, when it shall appear, will banish it from the earth. The Christian is of the day that will judge and destroy the wicked and wickedness itself from off the face of the

earth. Christ is the Sun of righteousness, and the faithful will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The world will say, “Peace and safety,” and in all security will believe in the continuance of its prosperity and the success of its designs, and the day will come suddenly upon them (compare 2 Peter 3:3). The Lord Himself has often declared it (Matt. 24:36-44; Mark 13:33-36; Luke 12:40, etc.; 17:26, etc.; 21:35, etc.)

It is a very solemn thing to see that the professing church (Rev. 3:3) which says that it lives and is in the truth, which has not Thyatira’s character of corruption, is yet to be treated as the world—at least, unless it repents.

We may perhaps wonder to find the Lord saying of a time like this, that men’s hearts will be failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth (Luke 21:26). But we see the two principles —both security and fear—already existing. Progress, success, the long continuance of a new development of human nature—this is the language of those who mock at the Lord’s coming; and yet beneath it all, what fears for the future are at the same time possessing and weighing down the heart! I use the word “principles,” because I do not believe that the moment of which the Lord speaks is yet come. But the shadow of coming events falls upon the heart. Blessed are they that belong to another world!

The apostle applies this difference of position—namely, that we belong to the day, and that it cannot therefore come upon us as a thief—to the character and walk of the Christian. Being a child of the light he is to walk as such. He lives in the day, though all is night and

darkness around him. One does not sleep in the day. They that sleep sleep in the night: they that are drunken are drunken in the night; these are the works of darkness. A Christian, the child of the day, must watch and be sober, clothing himself with all that constitutes the perfection of that mode of being which belongs to his position—namely, with faith and love and hope—principles which impart courage and give him confidence for pressing onwards. He has the breastplate of faith and love: he goes straight forward therefore against the enemy. He has the hope of this glorious salvation, which will bring him entire deliverance, as his helmet; so that he can lift up his head without fear in the midst of danger. We see that the apostle here brings to mind the three great principles of 1 Corinthians 13 to characterise the courage and stedfastness of the Christian, as at the beginning he shewed that they were the mainspring of daily walk.

Faith and love naturally connect us with God, revealed as He is in Jesus as the principle of communion; so that we walk with confidence in Him: His presence gives us strength. By faith He is the glorious object before our eyes. By love He dwells in us, and we realise what He is. Hope fixes our eyes especially on Christ, who is coming to bring us into the enjoyment of glory with Himself.

Consequently the apostle speaks thus: “For God hath not appointed us to wrath” (love is understood by faith, that which God wills—His mind respecting us), “but to obtain salvation.” It is this which we hope for; and he speaks of salvation as the final deliverance “by our Lord Jesus Christ”: and he naturally adds, “who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep “(have died before His coming or be then alive), “we should live together with

Him." Death does not deprive us of this deliverance and glory; for Jesus died. Death became the means of obtaining them for us; and if we die, we shall equally live with Him. He died for us, in our stead, in order that, happen what may, we should live with Him. Everything that hindered it is put out of our way and has lost its power; and, more than lost its power, has become a guarantee of our unhindered enjoyment of the full life of Christ in glory; so that we may comfort ourselves—and more than that, we may build ourselves up—with these glorious truths, through which God meets all our wants and all our necessities. This (v. 10) is the end of the special revelation with regard to those who sleep before the coming of the Lord Jesus, beginning with chapter 4:13.

I would here call the reader's attention to the way in which the apostle speaks of the Lord's coming in the different chapters of this epistle. It will be noticed that the Spirit does not present the church here as a body. Life is the subject—that of each Christian therefore individually: a very important point assuredly. {1Th 1}

In chapter 1 the expectation of the Lord is presented in a general way as characterising the Christian. They are converted to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Here it is the object itself that is presented, the Person of the Lord. God's own Son shall come, and shall satisfy all the heart's desire. This is neither His kingdom, nor the judgment, nor even rest; it is the Son of God; and this Son of God is Jesus, risen from among the dead, and who has delivered us from the wrath to come; for wrath is coming. Each believer therefore expects for himself the Son of God— expects Him from heaven. {1Th 2}

In chapter 2 it is association with the saints, joy in the saints at the coming of Christ. {1Th 3}

In chapter 3 responsibility is more the subject—responsibility in liberty and in joy; but still a position before God in connection with the Christian's walk and life here below. The Lord's appearing is the measure and test time of holiness. The testimony rendered by God to this life, by giving it its natural place, takes place when Christ is manifested with all His saints. It is not here His coming for us, but His coming with us. This distinction between the two events always exists. For Christians even and for the church, that which refers to responsibility is always found in connection with the appearing of the Lord; our joy, with His coming to take us to Himself.

Thus far then, we have the general expectation of the Lord in Person, His Son from heaven; love satisfied at His coming as regards others; holiness in its full value and full development. In chapter 4 it is not the connection of life with its full development in our being actually with Christ, but victory over death (which is no barrier to this); and, at the same time, the strengthening and establishment of hope in our common departure hence, similarly to that of Jesus, to be for ever with Him.

The exhortations that conclude the epistle are brief; the mighty action of the life of God in these dear disciples made them comparatively little needed. Exhortation is always good. There was nothing among them to blame. Happy condition! They were perhaps not sufficiently instructed for a large development of doctrine (the apostle hoped to see them for that purpose); but there was enough of life, a personal relationship with God

sufficiently true and real, to build them up on that ground. To him that hath shall more be given. The apostle could rejoice with them and confirm their hope and add to it some details as a revelation from God. The assembly in all ages is profited by it.

In the epistle to the Philippians we see life in the Spirit rising above all circumstances, as the fruit of long experience of the goodness and faithfulness of God; and thus shewing its remarkable power when the help of the saints had failed, and the apostle was in distress, his life in danger, after four years' imprisonment, by a merciless tyrant. It is then that he decides his case by the interests of the assembly. It is then that he can proclaim, that we ought always to rejoice in the Lord, and that Christ is all things to him, to live is Christ, death a gain to him. It is then that he can do all things through Him, who strengthens him. This he has learnt. In Thessalonians we have the freshness of the fountain near to its source; the energy of the first spring of life in the believer's soul, presenting all the beauty and purity and vigour of its first verdure under the influence of the sun that had risen upon them and made the sap of life rise, the first manifestations of which had not been deteriorated by contact with the world or by an enfeebled view of invisible things.

The apostle desired that the disciples should acknowledge those who laboured among them and guided them in grace and admonished them, and esteem them greatly for their work's sake. The operation of God always attracts a soul that is moved by the Holy Ghost, and commands its attention and its respect: on this foundation the apostle builds his exhortation. It is not office which is in question here (if such existed), but the

work which attracted and attached the heart. They ought to be known: spirituality acknowledged this operation of God. Love, devotedness, the answer to the need of souls, patience in dealing with them on the part of God—all this commended itself to the believer's heart: and it blessed God for the care He bestowed upon His children. God acted in the labourer and in the hearts of the faithful. Blessed be God, it is an ever-existing principle, and one that never grows weaker!

The same Spirit produced peace among themselves. This grace was of great value. If love appreciated the work of God in the labourer, it would esteem the brother as in the presence of God: self-will would not act.

Now this renunciation of self-will, and this practical sense of the operation and presence of God, gives power to warn the unruly, to comfort the fearful, to help the weak, and to be patient towards all. The apostle exhorts them to it. Communion with God is the power and His word the guide in so doing. In no case were they to render evil for evil, but to follow that which was good among themselves and towards all. All this conduct depends on communion with God, on His presence with us, which makes us superior to evil. He is this in love; and we can be so by walking with Him.

Such were the apostle's exhortations to guide their walk with others. As regards their personal state, joy, prayer, thanksgiving in all things, these should be their characteristics. With respect to the public actings of the Spirit in their midst, the apostle's exhortations to these simple and happy Christians were equally brief. They were not to hinder the action of the Spirit in their midst (for this is the meaning of quenching the Spirit); nor to

despise that which He might say to them, even by the mouth of the most simple, if He were pleased to use it. Being spiritual, they could judge all things. They were therefore not to receive everything that presented itself, even in the name of the Spirit, but to prove all things. They were to hold fast that which was good; those who by faith have received the truth of the word do not waver. One is not ever learning the truth of that which one has learnt from God. As to evil, they were to abstain from it in all its forms. Such were the apostle's brief exhortations to these Christians who indeed rejoiced his heart. And in truth it is a fine picture of christian walk, which we find here so livingly portrayed in the apostle's communications.

He concludes his epistle by commending them to the God of peace, that they might be preserved blameless until the coming of the Lord Jesus.

After an epistle like this his heart turned readily to the God of peace; for we enjoy peace in the presence of God —not only peace of conscience but peace of heart.

In the previous part we found the activity of love in the heart; that is to say, God present and acting in us, who are viewed as partaking, at the same time, of the divine nature, which is the spring of that holiness which will be manifested in all its perfection before God at the coming of Jesus with all His saints. Here it is the God of peace, to whom the apostle looks for the accomplishment of this work. There it was the activity of a divine principle in us—a principle connected with the presence of God and our communion with Him. Here it is the perfect rest of heart in which holiness develops itself. The absence of peace in the heart arises from the activity of the

passions and the will, increased by the sense of powerlessness to satisfy or even to gratify them.

But in God all is peace. He can be active in love; He can glorify Himself by creating what He will; He can act in judgment to cast out the evil that is before His eyes. But He rests ever in Himself, and both in good and in evil He knows the end from the beginning and is undisturbed. When He fills the heart. He imparts this rest to us: we cannot rest in ourselves; we cannot find rest of heart in the actings of our passions, either without an object or upon an object, nor in the rending and destructive energy of our own will. We find our rest in God—not the rest that implies weariness, but rest of heart in the possession of all that we desire, and of that which even forms our desires and fully satisfies them, in the possession of an object in which conscience has nothing to reproach us and has but to be silent, in the certainty that it is the Supreme Good which the heart is enjoying, the supreme and only authority to whose will it responds —and that will is love towards us. God bestows rest, peace. He is never called the God of joy. He gives us joy truly, and we ought to rejoice; but joy implies something surprising, unexpected, exceptional, at least in contrast with, and in consequence of, evil. The peace that we possess, that which satisfies us, has no element of this kind, nothing which is in contrast, nothing which disturbs. It is more deep, more perfect, than joy. It is more the satisfaction of a nature in that which perfectly answers to it, and in which it develops itself, without any contrast being necessary to enhance the satisfaction of a heart that has not all which it desires, or of which it is capable.

God, as we have said, rests thus in Himself—is this rest for Himself. He gives us, and is for us, this entire peace. The conscience being perfect through the work of Christ who has made peace and reconciled us to God, the new nature—and consequently the heart—finds its perfect satisfaction in God, and the will is silent; moreover, it has nothing further to desire.

It is not only that God meets the desires that we have: He is the source of new desires to the new man by the revelation of Himself in love.38 He is both the source of the nature and its infinite object; and that, in love. It is His part to be so. It is more than creation; it is reconciliation, which is more than creation, because there is in it more development of love, that is to say, of God: and it is thus that we know God. It is that which He is essentially in Christ.

In the angels He glorifies Himself in creation: they excel us in strength. In Christians He glorifies Himself in reconciliation, to make them the first-fruits of His new creation, when He shall have reconciled all things in heaven and on earth by Christ. Therefore it is written "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children [sons] of God." They have His nature and His character.

It is in these relationships with God—or rather it is God in these relationships with us in peace, in His communion, who develops sanctification, our inward conformity of affection and intelligence (and consequently of outward conduct) with Him and His will. "The God of peace himself sanctify you wholly." May there be nothing in us that does not yield to this benignant influence of peace which we enjoy in

communion with God! May no power or force in us own anything but Himself! In all things may He be our all, so that He only may rule in our hearts!

He has brought us perfectly into this place of blessedness in Christ and by His work. There is nothing between us and God but the exercise of His love, the enjoyment of our happiness, and the worship of our hearts. We are the proof before Him, the testimony, the fruit, of the accomplishment of all that He holds most precious, of that which has perfectly glorified Him, of that in which He delights, and of the glory of the One who has accomplished it, namely, of Christ, and of His work. We are the fruit of the redemption that Christ has accomplished, and the objects of the satisfaction which God must feel in the exercise of His love. God in grace is the God of peace for us; for here divine righteousness finds its satisfaction, and love its perfect exercise.

The apostle now prays that, in this character, God may work in us to make everything respond to Himself thus revealed. Here only is this development of humanity given—"body, soul, and spirit." The object is assuredly not metaphysical, but to express man in all the parts of his being; the vessel by which he expresses that which he is, the natural affections of his soul, the elevated workings of his mind, through which he is above the animals and in intelligent relationship with God. May God be found in each, as the mover, spring, and guide!

In general the words "soul and spirit" are used without making any distinction between them, for the soul of man was formed very differently from that of animals in that God breathed into his nostrils the breath (spirit) of life, and it was thus that man became a living soul.

Therefore it suffices to say soul as to man, and the other is supposed. Or, in saying spirit, in this sense the elevated character of his soul is expressed. The animal has also its natural affections, has a living soul, attaches itself, knows the persons who do it good, devotes itself to its master, loves him, will even give its life for him; but it has not that which can be in relationship with God (alas! which can set itself at enmity against Him), which can occupy itself with things outside its own nature as the master of others.

The Spirit then wills that man, reconciled with God, should be consecrated, in every part of his being, to the God who has brought him into relationship with Himself by the revelation of His love, and by the work of His grace, and that nothing in the man should admit an object beneath the divine nature of which he is partaker; so that he should thus be preserved blameless unto the coming of Christ.

Let us observe here, that it is in no wise beneath the new nature in us to perform our duties faithfully in all the various relationships in which God has placed us; but quite the contrary. That which is required is to bring God into them, His authority, and the intelligence which that imparts. Therefore it is said to husbands to live with their wives “according to knowledge,” or intelligence; that is to say, not only with human and natural affections (which, as things are, do not by themselves even maintain their place), but as before God and conscious of His will. It may be that God may call us, in connection with the extraordinary work of His grace, to consecrate ourselves entirely to it; but otherwise the will of God is accomplished in the relationships in which He has placed us, and divine intelligence and obedience to God

are developed in them. Finally God has called us to this life of holiness with Himself; He is faithful and He will accomplish it. May He enable us to cleave to Him, that we may realise it!

Observe again here, how the coming of Christ is introduced, and the expectation of this coming, as an integral part of christian life. “Blameless,” it says, “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The life which had developed itself in obedience and holiness meets the Lord at His coming. Death is not in question. The life which we have found is to be such when He appears. The man, in every part of his being, moved by this life, is found there blameless when Jesus comes. Death was overcome (not yet destroyed): a new life is ours. This life, and the man living of this life, are found, with their Head and Source, in the glory. Then will the weakness disappear which is connected with his present condition. That which is mortal shall be swallowed up of life: that is all. We are Christ’s: He is our life. We wait for Him, that we may be with Him, and that He may perfect all things in the glory.

Let us also here examine a little into that which this passage teaches us with regard to sanctification. It is connected indeed with a nature, but it is linked with an object; and it depends for its realisation on the operation of another, namely, of God Himself; and it is founded on a perfect work of reconciliation with God, already accomplished. Inasmuch as it is founded on an accomplished reconciliation, into which we enter by the reception of a new nature, the scriptures consider Christians as already perfectly sanctified in Christ. It is practically carried out by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who, in imparting this nature, separates us—as

thus born again—entirely from the world. It is important to maintain this truth, and to stand very clearly and distinctly on this ground: otherwise practical sanctification soon becomes detached from a new nature received, and is but the amelioration of the natural man and then it is quite legal, a return—after reconciliation—into doubt and uncertainty, because, though justified, the man is not accounted meet for heaven—this depends on progress so that justification does not give peace with God. Scripture says, “Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” Progress there is, but it is not in scripture connected with meetness. The thief was meet for Paradise and went there. Such views are an enfeebling, not to say destructive, of the work of redemption, that is, of its appreciation in our hearts by faith.

We are then sanctified (it is thus the scripture most frequently speaks) by God the Father, by the blood and the offering of Christ, and by the Spirit—that is to say, we are set apart for God personally and for ever. In this point of view justification is presented in the word as consequent upon sanctification, a thing into which we enter through it. Taken up as sinners in the world, we are set apart by the Holy Ghost to enjoy all the efficacy of the work of Christ according to the counsels of the Father: set apart by the communication of a new life, no doubt, but placed by this setting apart in the enjoyment of all that Christ has gained for us. I say again, It is very important to hold fast this truth both for the glory of God and for our own peace: but the Spirit of God in this epistle does not speak of it in this point of view, but of the practical realisation of the development of this life of separation from the world and from evil. He speaks of

this divine development in the inner man, which makes sanctification a real and intelligent condition of soul, a state of practical communion with God, according to that nature and to the revelation of God with which it is connected.

In this respect we find indeed a principle of life which works in us—that which is called a subjective state: but it is impossible to separate this operation in us from an object (man would be God if it were so), nor consequently from a continual work of God in us that holds us in communion with that object, which is God Himself. Accordingly it is through the truth by the word, whether at first in the communication of life, or in detail all along our path. “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.”

Man, we know, has degraded himself. He has enslaved himself to the lusts of the animal part of his being. But how? By departing from God. God does not sanctify man apart from the knowledge of Himself, leaving man still at a distance from Him; but, while giving him a new nature which is capable of it, by giving to this nature (which cannot even exist without it) an object—Himself, He does not make man independent, as he wished to be: the new man is the dependent man; it is his perfection—Jesus Christ exemplified this in His life. The new man is a man dependent in his affections, who desires to be so, who delights in, and cannot be happy without being so, and whose dependence is on love, while still obedient as a dependent being ought to be.

Thus they who are sanctified possess a nature that is holy in its desires and its tastes. It is the divine nature in them, the life of Christ. But they do not cease to be men.

They have God revealed in Christ for their object. Sanctification is developed in communion with God, and in affections which go back to Christ, and which wait for Him. But the new nature cannot reveal an object to itself; and still less could it have its object by setting God aside at its will. It is dependent on God for the revelation of Himself. His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost whom He has given us; and the same Spirit takes of the things of Christ and communicates them to us. Thus we grow in the knowledge of God, being strengthened mightily by His Spirit in the inner man, that we may "comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and be filled unto the fulness of God. Thus, "we all with open face beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth."

We see by these passages, which might be multiplied, that we are dependent on an object, and that we are dependent on the strength of another. Love acts in order to work in us according to this need.

Our setting apart for God, which is complete (for it is by means of a nature that is purely of Himself, and in absolute responsibility to Him, for we are no longer our own, but are bought with a price, and sanctified by the blood of Christ according to the will of God, who will have us for His own), places us in a relationship, the development of which (by an increasing knowledge of God, who is the object of our new nature) is practical sanctification, wrought in us by the power of the Holy Ghost, the witness in us of the love of God. He attaches

the heart to God, ever revealing Him more and more, and at the same time unfolding the glory of Christ and all the divine qualities that were displayed in Him in human nature, thus forming ours as born of God.

Therefore it is, as we have seen in this epistle, that love, working in us, is the means of sanctification (chap. 3:12, 13). It is the activity of the new nature, of the divine nature in us; and that connected with the presence of God; for he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God. And in this chapter 5 the saints are commended to God Himself, that He may work it in them; while we are always set in view of the glorious objects of our faith in order to accomplish it.

We may here more particularly call the reader's attention to these objects. They are, God Himself, and the coming of Christ: on the one hand, communion with God; on the other, waiting for Christ. It is most evident that communion with God is the practical position of the highest sanctification. He who knows that we shall see Jesus as He now is, and be like Him, purifies himself even as He is pure. By our communion with the God of peace we are wholly sanctified. If God is practically our all, we are altogether holy. (We are not speaking of any change in the flesh, which can neither be subjected to God nor please Him). The thought of Christ and His coming preserves us practically, and in detail, and intelligently, blameless. It is God Himself who thus preserves us, and who works in us to occupy our hearts and cause us continually to grow.

But this point deserves yet a few more words. The freshness of christian life in the Thessalonians made it, as it were, more objective; so that these objects are

prominent, and very distinctly recognised by the heart. We have already said that they are God the Father, and the Lord Jesus. With reference to the communion of love with the saints as his crown and glory, he speaks only of the Lord Jesus. This has a special character of reward, although a reward in which love reigns. Jesus Himself had the joy that was set before Him as sustainment in His sufferings, a joy which thus was personal to Himself. The apostle also, as regarded his work and labour, waited with Christ for its fruit. Besides this case of the apostle (chap. 2), we find God Himself and Jesus as the object before us, and the joy of communion with God—and this, in the relationship of Father—and with Christ, whose glory and position we share through grace.

Thus it is only in the two epistles to the Thessalonians that we find the expression "to the church which is in God the Father."39 The sphere of their communion is thus shewn, founded on the relationship in which they found themselves with God Himself in the character of Father (1 Thess. 1:3, 9, 10; 3:13; 4:15, 16; and here v. 23). It is important to remark, that the more vigorous and living Christianity is, the more objective it is. It is but saying that God and the Lord Jesus have a greater place in our thoughts; and that we rest more really upon them. This epistle to the Thessalonians is the part of scripture which instructs on this point; and it is a means of judging many a fallacy in the heart, and of giving a greater simplicity to our Christianity.

The apostle closes his epistle by asking for the prayers of the brethren, saluting them with the confidence of affection, and adjuring them to have his epistle read to all the holy brethren. His heart forgot none of them. He would be in relationship with all according to this

spiritual affection and personal bond. Apostle towards all of them, he would have them recognise those who laboured among them, but he maintained withal his own relationship. His was a heart which embraced all the revealed counsels of God on the one hand, and did not lose sight of the least of His saints on the other.

It remains to take notice of one interesting circumstance as to the manner in which the apostle instructs them. He takes, in the first chapter, the truths which were precious to their heart, but were still somewhat vaguely seized by their intelligence, and as to which they were indeed fallen into mistakes, and employs them (in the clearness in which he possessed them himself) in his practical instructions, and applies them to known and experienced relationships, that their souls might be well established on positive truth, and clear as to its use, before he touched on their error and the mistakes they had made. They waited for His Son from heaven. This they already possessed clearly in their hearts; but they would be in the presence of God when Jesus comes with all His saints. This was clearing up a very important point without directly touching the error. Their heart got straight as to the truth in its practical application to what the heart possessed. They understood what it was to be before God the Father. It was much more intimate and real than a manifestation of terrestrial and finite glory. Further they would be before God when Jesus came with all His saints; a simple truth which demonstrated itself to the heart by the simple fact that Jesus could not have some only of His assembly. The heart seized this truth without an effort; yet in doing so it was established, as was the understanding also, in what made the whole truth clear, and that in view of the

relationship of the Thessalonians to Christ and those that were His. The joy even of the apostle in meeting them all (those who had died consequently, as well as the living) at the coming of Jesus, placed the soul on an entirely different ground from that of being found here, and blessed by the arrival of Jesus when they were here below.

Thus enlightened, confirmed, established, in the real bearing of the truth which they possessed already, by a development of it which connected itself with their best affections and with their most intimate spiritual knowledge, founded on their communion with God, they were ready with certain fixed basis of truth to enter on and set aside without difficulty an error which was not in accord with what they now knew how to appreciate at its just value, as forming part of their moral possessions. Special revelation made all clear as to details. This manner of proceeding is very instructive.

29 They are found oftener in Paul's writings than is thought; as 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and Colossians 1:4, 5. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 we have faith and love, but he has to clear up their thoughts as to hope.

30 Compare Proverbs 8:30, 31 and Luke 2:14, where read, "good pleasure in men." It is beautiful to see the angels unjealously celebrating it. Love downwards in grace is great according to the misery and unworthiness of the object 5 upwards as the affection of the soul according to the worthiness; see both in Christ, Ephesians 5:2. In both in Christ self is wholly given up. He gave, not sought, Himself. The law takes self as measure as to the neighbour, and supposes him on the same footing. There is no love downwards.

31 Weight and glory are the same word in Hebrew.

32 It is well here to recall that, though Christ is Son over God's house, as Lord He is not Lord over the assembly but over individuals. Besides this, He is in a general sense Lord of all. But His action towards individuals ministers to the well-being of the assembly.

33 * It is very striking how holiness here, and manifestation in glory, are brought together as one thing in scripture, only the veil drawn aside when the glory is there. Even Christ was declared Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection. We beholding the glory with unveiled face are changed into the same image from glory to glory. So here; we are to walk in love, to be unblamable in holiness. We should have said here j but no, the veil is drawn at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. In Ephesians 5 He washes us with the word, to present us a glorious body without spot to Himself.

34 "in the matter," v. 6, in the Greek, is a euphemism for "these things."

35 It has been thought that the apostle speaks here of those who had died for His name's sake as martyrs. It may have been so in consequence of the persecutions, but "through Jesus "would be a singular way of expressing it; dia (through) with a genitive is used for a state of things, a condition that we are in, that characterises us. Being in Christ, their removal was but falling asleep, not dying. They had this position by means of Jesus, not for His name's sake. (Compare, however, 2 Cor. 4:14.)

36 In order that we may all return—be brought back with Him— together.

37 Compare 2 Corinthians 5:1, etc. We have already remarked as a fact that this passage is a new distinct revelation. But the bearing of this fact appears here and proves that it has much importance. The Christian's life is so connected with the day (that is to say, with the power of the life of light of which Christ lives), and Christ who is already in glory in so truly the believer's life, that he has no other thought than to pass into it by this power of Christ's, which will transform him (see 2 Cor. 5:4). It required a new and accessory revelation to explain that which was wanting to the intelligence of the Thessalonians, how the dead saints should not lose their part in it. The same power would be applied to their dead bodies as to the mortal bodies of the living saints, and all would be caught up together. But the victory over death was already gained, and Christ, according to the power of resurrection, being already the believer's life, it was but natural, according to that power, that he should pass without dying into the fulness of life with Christ. This was so much the natural thought of faith that it required an express, and as I have said, an accessory revelation to explain how the dead should have their part in it. To us now it presents no difficulty. It is the other side of this truth which we lack, which belongs to a much more lively faith, and which realises much more the power of the life of Christ and His victory over death. No doubt the Thessalonians should have considered that Christ had died and risen again, and not have allowed the abundant power of their joy in realising their own portion in Christ to hide from them the certainty of the portion of those who slept in Him. But we see (and God allowed it that we might see) how the life which they possessed was connected with the position of the Head triumphant over death. The apostle

does not weaken this faith and hope, but he adds (that they may be comforted by the thought) that the triumph of Christ would have the same power over the sleeping as over the living saints; and that God would bring back the former as well as the latter with Jesus in glory, having caught them up together as their common portion to be for ever with Him.

To us also God gives this truth, this revelation of His power. He has permitted thousands to fall asleep, because (blessed be His name!) He had other thousands to call in; but the life of Christ has not lost its power, nor the truth its certainty. We as living ones wait for Him because He is our life. We shall see Him in resurrection, if haply we die before He comes to seek us; and the time draws near. Observe, also, that this revelation gives another direction to the hope of the Thessalonians, because it distinguishes with much precision between our departure hence to join the Lord in the air, and our return to the earth with Him. Nor this only; but it shews the first to be the principal thing for Christians, while at the same time confirming and elucidating the other point. I question whether the Thessalonians would not better have understood this return with Christ than our departure hence all together to rejoin Him. Even at their conversion they had been brought to wait for Jesus from heaven. From the first the great and essential principle was established in their hearts—the Person of Christ was the object of their hearts' expectation, and they were separated thereby from the world.

Perhaps they had some vague idea that they were to appear with Him in glory, but how it was to be accomplished they knew not. They were to be ready at any moment for His coming, and He and they were to be

glorified together before the universe. This they knew. It is a summary of the truth. Now the apostle develops more than one point here in connection with this general truth. 1st, they would be with Christ at His coming. This, I think, is but a happy application of a truth which they already possessed, giving a little more precision to one of its precious details. At the end of chapter 3 we have the truth plainly stated (although it was still indistinct in their hearts, since they thought the dead in Christ would be deprived of it) that all the saints should come with Jesus—an essential point as to the character of our relationship to Him. So that Jesus was expected—the saints should be together with Jesus at the time of His coming—all the saints should come with Him. This fixed and gave precision to their ideas on a point already more or less known. 2nd, That which follows is a new revelation on the occasion of their mistake with regard to those who slept. They thought indeed that the Christians who were ready should be glorified with Christ when He came back to this world; but the dead—were they ready? They were not present to share the glorious manifestation of Christ on the earth. For, I doubt not, the vague idea that possessed the mind of the Thessalonians was this: Jesus would return to this world, and they who were waiting for Him would share His glorious manifestation on the earth. Now the apostle declares that the dead saints were in the same position as Jesus who had died. God had not left Him in the grave; nor would He those who had, like Him, been there. God would also bring them with Him when He should return in glory to this earth. But this was not all. The coming of Christ in glory to the earth was not the principal thing. The dead in Christ should be raised, and then, with the living, should go to meet the Lord in the

air, before His manifestation, and return with Him to the earth in glory; and thus should they be ever with the Lord. This was the principal thing, the Christian's portion; namely, to dwell eternally with Christ and in heaven. The portion of the faithful was on high—was Christ Himself, although they would appear with Him in the glory. For this world it would then be the judgment.

38 Hence there is the opposite to weariness in the heavenly enjoyment of God; because He who is the infinite object of enjoyment is the infinite source and strength of capacity to enjoy, though we enjoy as recipient creatures.

39 Perhaps too in connection with their recent deliverance from idols to the one true God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians

In the second epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle corrects some errors into which these disciples had fallen with regard to the day of the Lord through certain false teachers; as in part of the first epistle he had enlightened the ignorance of the believers themselves respecting the portion of the saints at the coming of Christ to take them to Himself—a point on which they were evidently but little instructed.

A measure of Jewish darkness was on their minds; and they were, in some points, still subjected to the influence of that unhappy nation, which was ever struggling to maintain a position lost through its unbelief.

This Jewish influence enables us to understand why the apostle spoke as he did in chapter 2:15, 16, of the first epistle. At that time this influence shewed itself in the tendency of the Thessalonians to lose sight of the heavenly side of the Lord’s coming, to think that He would return to the earth and that they should then be glorified with Him—as a Jew might have believed—and that the dead saints would therefore not be present to share this glory. I do not say that this thought had assumed a definite form in the minds of the Thessalonians. To them the principal and living object was the Lord Himself, and they were awaiting His return with hearts full of joy and life; but the heavenly side of this expectation had not its place clearly marked in their minds, and they connected the coming too much with the manifestation, so that the earthly character

predominated, and the dead seemed to be shut out from it.

When the second epistle was written, this Jewish influence had another character; and the false teachers were more directly concerned in it.

The faithful at Thessalonica had learnt to contemplate “the day of the Lord “as a day of judgment. The Old Testament had spoken much of this day of the Lord, a day of darkness and unparalleled judgment, a day of trial to men (compare Isaiah 13, Joel 2, Amos 5:18). Now the Thessalonians were undergoing dreadful persecution. Perhaps their hope of an earthly intervention of the Lord, during their lifetime, was weakened. The apostle at least rejoiced at the increase of their faith, and the abundant exercise of their love, while he is silent with regard to their hope; and the joy of christian life is not found here as it was manifested in the first epistle. Nevertheless they were walking well, and the apostle gloried in them40 in the churches of God. But the false teachers profited by their condition to mislead them by means of their sufferings, which weighed more heavily on their hearts from the joy of hope being a little weakened; and at the same time the remains of the influence of Judaising thoughts, or of habits of mind formed through them, furnished occasion to the assaults of the enemy. The instrument of the subtle malice told them that the day of the Lord, that fearful time, was already come—the word (chap. 2:2) is not “at hand,” but “come,” “present”41— and all that the Thessalonians were suffering, and by which their hearts were shaken, appeared like a testimony to prove it and to confirm the words of the false teachers. Was it not written that it should be a day of trial and anguish?

The words of these teachers, moreover, had the pretension of being more than human reasoning; it was a word of the Lord, it was the Spirit who spoke, it was a letter from an inspired channel: and so bold and wicked were they in regard to this matter, that they did not fear to adduce the apostle's own name as their authority for declaring that the day was come. Now the dominion of fear, which Satan can exercise over the mind, when it is not kept of God in peace and joy, is astonishing. "In nothing terrified by your adversaries," is the apostle's word to the Philippians, "which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God." In such a state of mind as this everything is believed; or rather everything is feared, and nothing is believed. The heart gives itself up to this fear, and is ready to believe anything; for it is in darkness and knows not what to believe. Thus the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians (chap. 2) not to be soon shaken in mind so as to lose their stability in the truth, and not to be troubled.

The apostle deals with the case in the same manner as in the first epistle. Before entering on the error he treats the same subject in its true light, building upon the knowledge which the Thessalonians already possessed. Only he sets it forth with clearness in its application to the circumstances of the moment. By this means they were delivered from the influence of the error, and from the disturbance of mind which it had caused; and were rendered capable of looking at the error, as being themselves outside it, and of judging it according to the instruction that the apostle gave them.

They were persecuted and were in distress and suffering, and the enemy took advantage of it. The

apostle puts that fact in its right place. He encourages them with the thought that it was a kind of seal upon them of their being worthy of the kingdom for which they were suffering. But more, the “day of the Lord “was the coming of the Lord in judgment; but it was not to make His own suffer that He was coming—it was to punish the wicked. Persecution therefore could not be the day of the Lord; for in persecution the wicked had the upper hand and did their own will and inflicted suffering on those whom the Lord loved. Could that be His day! The apostle does not apply this argument to the question, but he puts the facts in their place; so that all the use which the enemy made of them fell of itself to the ground. The truth of the facts was there in its simplicity, giving them their evident and natural character. When God should take the thing in hand, He would recompense tribulation to those who troubled His children, and these should have rest—should be in peace. The moment of their entering into this rest is not at all the subject here, but the contrast between their actual condition and that which it would be if Jesus were come. It was not to persecute and harass His own that He was coming. In His day they should be at rest, and the wicked in distress; for He was coming to punish the latter by driving them away for ever from the glory of His presence. When we understand that the Thessalonians had been induced to believe that the day of the Lord was already come, the import of this first chapter is very plain.

Two principles are here established. First, the righteous judgment of God: it is righteous in His eyes, on the one hand, to reward those who suffer for His kingdom’s sake: and, on the other, to requite those who persecute

His children. In the second place, the glorious manifestation of the Lord Jesus: His own should be in rest and happiness with Him, when His power should be in exercise.

We see also here two reasons for judgment—they did not know God, and they did not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. All being without excuse as to the testimony that God had ever given concerning Himself, some among them had added the rejection of the positive revelation of His grace in the gospel of Christ to their abuse of their natural relationship with God and their forgetfulness of His Majesty.

Meanwhile the apostle presents the positive result in blessing of the manifestation of Jesus in glory. He will come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that have believed in Him, and therefore in the Thessalonians: a thorough proof, at least that they were not to view their persecuted condition as a demonstration that the day was come. With regard to themselves, they were thus entirely delivered from the confusion by which the enemy sought to disquiet them; and the apostle could treat the question of this error with hearts which, as to their own condition, were set free from it and at rest.

These considerations characterised his prayers on their behalf. He sought from God that they might always be worthy of this vocation, and that the Lord might be glorified in them by the power of faith, which would shine the brighter through their persecutions; and that afterwards they might be glorified in Him at the manifestation of His glory according to the grace of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that the apostle has placed their souls on the ground of truth, he enters upon the subject of the error, shewing that which had occasioned his remarks. Of this we have already spoken.

In answering this error, and in guarding them from the wily efforts of seducers, he puts everything in its place here by appealing to precious truths of which he had already spoken. Their gathering together unto Christ in the air was a demonstration of the impossibility of the day of the Lord being already come.

Moreover with regard to this last he presents two considerations: first, the day could not be already come, since Christians were not yet gathered to the Lord, and they were to come with Him; second, the wicked one who has then to be judged had not yet appeared, so that the judgment could not be executed.

The apostle had already instructed the Thessalonians with regard to this wicked one, when at Thessalonica; and in the former epistle he had taught them concerning the rapture of the church. In order that the Lord should come in judgment, iniquity must have reached its height, and open opposition to God have been manifested. But the truth had another and a more precious side: the saints were to be in the same position as Christ, to be gathered together unto Him, before He could manifest Himself in glory to those outside. But these truths require a more connected examination.

Their gathering together unto Christ before the manifestation was a truth known to the Thessalonians; it is not revealed here, it is used as an argument. The Lord Jesus was coming, but it was impossible that He should be without His church in the glory. The King would

indeed punish His rebellious subjects; but, before doing so, He would bring to Himself those who had been faithful to Him amid the unfaithful, in order to bring them back with Him and publicly to honour them in the midst of the rebels. But the apostle here speaks only of the rapture itself, and he adjures them only by that truth not to allow themselves to be shaken in mind as though the day were come. What an assured truth must this have been to Christians, since the apostle could appeal to it as to a known point, on which the heart could rest! The relationship of the church to Christ, its being necessarily in the same position with Him, rendered the idea that the day was already come a mere folly.

In the second place, the already known fact is asserted, that the apostasy must previously take place, and then the man of sin be revealed. Solemn truth! Everything takes its place. The forms and the name of Christianity have long been maintained; true Christians have been disowned; but now there should be a public renunciation of the faith—an apostasy. True Christians should have their true place in heaven. But, besides this, there should be a person who would fully realise in sin the character of man without God. He is the man of sin. He does his own will—it is but Adam fully developed; and, incited by the enemy, he opposes himself to God (it is open enmity against God) and he exalts himself above all that bears the name of God; he assumes the place of God in His temple. So that there is apostasy, that is, the open renunciation of Christianity in general, and an individual who concentrates in his own person (as to the principles of iniquity) the opposition that is made against God.

It will be noticed that the character of the wicked one is religious here, or rather anti-religious. The apostle does not speak of a secular power of the world, whatever its iniquity may be. The man of sin assumes a religious character. He exalts himself against the true God, but he shews himself as God42 in the temple of God. Observe here that the sphere is on earth. It is not a god for faith. He shews himself as a god for the earth. The profession of Christianity has been abandoned. Sin then characterises an individual, a man, who fills up the measure of the apostasy of human nature, and, as a man, proclaims his independence of God. The principle of sin in man is his own will. He arises, as we have already seen, out of the rejection of Christianity. In this respect also evil is at its height.

This man of sin exalts himself above God, and, sitting as God in the temple of God, he defies the God of Israel. This last feature gives his formal character. He is in conflict with God, as placing himself publicly in this position—shewing himself as God in the temple of God. It is the God of Israel who will take vengeance on him.

Christianity, Judaism, natural religion, all are rejected. Man takes a place there on earth, exalting himself above it all, in opposition to God; and, in particular, arrogating to himself (for man needs a God, needs something to worship) the place and the honours of God, and of the God of Israel.43 These verses present the wicked one in connection with the state of man, and with the different relationships in which man has stood towards God. In them all he shews himself as apostate, and then he assumes the place of God Himself— the first object of human ambition, as its attainment was the first suggestion of Satan.

In that which follows, we see not the condition itself of apostasy with regard to the different positions in which God had placed man, but simply man unrestrained, and the work of Satan. The man is but the vessel of the enemy's power.

Man in whom is the fulness of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus, and man filled with the energy of Satan, are opposed to each other. Before, it was man forsaking God, wicked, and exalting himself. Here, it is opposition against God on the part of man, unrestrained, and inspired by Satan himself. Consequently we have (not the wicked one, but) the lawless—the unbridled— one. The principle is the same, for "sin is lawlessness" (see remarks 1 John 3:4). But in this first case man is viewed in his departure from God, and in his guiltiness; in the second, as acknowledging none but himself. To this condition in which all restraint will be removed, a barrier has yet existed.

The apostle had already told them of the apostasy, and of the manifestation of the man of sin. He now says that the Thessalonians ought to know the hindrance that existed to his progress and his manifestation before the appointed time. He does not say that he had told them, but they ought to know it. Knowing the character of the wicked one, the barrier revealed itself. The main point here is that it was a barrier. The principle of the evil was already at work: a barrier alone prevented its development. Its character, when developed, would be unbridled will which exalts and opposes itself.44 Unbridled self-will being the principle of the evil, that which bridles this will is the barrier. Now it exalts itself above all that bears the name of God, or to which homage is paid: that which hinders it therefore is the

power of God acting in government here below as authorised by Him. The grossest abuse of power still bears this last character. Christ could say to Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above.” Wicked as he might be, his power is owned as coming from God. Thus, although men had rejected and crucified the Son of God, so that their iniquity appeared to be at its height, the hindrance still existed in full. Afterwards God, having sent His Spirit, gathers out the church, and, although the mystery of iniquity began immediately to work mingling the will of men with the worship of God in Spirit, God had always (He still has) the object of His loving care upon the earth. The Holy Ghost was here below; the assembly, be its condition what it might, was still on earth, and God maintained the barrier. And as the porter had opened the door to Jesus in spite of all obstacles, so He sustains everything, however great the energy and progress of evil. The evil is bridled: God is the source of authority on earth. There is one who hinders until he be taken out of the way. Now when the assembly (the assembly, that is, as composed of the true members of Christ) is gone, and consequently the Holy Ghost as the Comforter is no longer dwelling here below, then the apostasy takes place,45 the time to remove the hindrance is come, the evil is unbridled, and at length (without saying how much time it will take) the evil assumes a definite shape in him who is its head. The beast comes up from the abyss. Satan—not God—gives him his authority; and in the second beast all the energy of Satan is present. The man of sin is there. Here it is not outward and secular power that is spoken of, but the religious side of Satan’s energy.

With regard to the individual instruments who compose the barrier, they may change every moment, and it was not the object of the Holy Ghost to name them. He who was the one of them that existed when this epistle was written would not be so at the present time; to have named him then would have been of no use to us in the present day. The object was to declare that the evil which should be judged was already working, that there was no remedy for it, that it was only a hindrance on God's part which prevented its full development: a principle of the highest importance with regard to the history of Christianity.

Whatever form it might take, the apostasy of the men who would renounce grace would necessarily be more absolute than any other. It is opposition to the Lord. It has the character of an adversary. The other principle of human iniquity enters into it, but this is the source of the "perdition." It is the rejection of goodness; it is direct enmity.

"That which hinders" is in general only an instrument, a means, which prevents the manifestation of the man of sin— the wicked one. So long as the assembly is on earth, the pretension to be God in His temple cannot take place or at least would have no influence. Satan has his sphere, and must needs have it, in the mystery of iniquity; but there is no longer a mystery when the place of God in His temple is openly taken. That which hinders is therefore still present. But there is a person active in maintaining this hindrance. Here I think indeed that it is God in the Person of the Holy Ghost, who during the time called "the things that are," restrains the evil and guards divine authority in the world. As long as that subsists, the unrestrained exaltation of wickedness

cannot take place. Consequently I do not doubt but that the rapture of the saints is the occasion of the hindrance being removed and all restraint loosed, although some of the ways of God are developed before the full manifestation of the evil.

This thought does not rest upon great principles only: the passage itself supplies elements which shew the state of things when the power of evil develops itself. 1st, The apostasy has already taken place. This could hardly be said if the testimony of the assembly still subsisted, as it had in time past, or even yet more distinctly as being freed from all false and corrupting elements. 2nd, Authority—as established of God, so far as exercising a restraint on man's will in God's name—has disappeared from the scene, for the wicked one exalts himself against all that is called God and to which homage is paid, and presents himself as God in the temple of God. Compare Psalm 82, where God stands among the gods (the judges) to judge them before He inherits the nations. Before that solemn hour when God will judge the judges of the earth, this wicked one, despising all authority that comes from Him, sets himself up as God: and that on the earth, where the judgment will be manifested. And then, 3rd, In place of the Holy Ghost and His power manifested on the earth, we find the power of Satan, and with precisely the same tokens that bore witness to the Person of Christ. So that the passage itself, whether as to man or as to the enemy, gives us (in the three points of which we have spoken) the full confirmation of that which we have ventured to set forth.

The assembly, the powers ordained by God upon the earth, the Holy Ghost present here as the Comforter in

lieu of Christ, have all (as regards the manifestation of the government and the work of God) given place to the self-willed unbridled man, and to the power of the enemy.

In saying this we speak of the sphere of this prophecy, which moreover embraces that of the public testimony of God on earth.

Definitely then we have man here in his own nature—as it has displayed itself by forsaking God—in the full pursuit of his own will in rebellion against God; the wilful man, developed as the result of apostasy from the position of grace in which the assembly stood, and in contempt of all the governmental authority of God on the earth. And since that authority had shewn itself directly and properly in Judea, this contempt and the spirit of rebellion in man, who exalts himself above everything, but who cannot be heavenly (heaven, and all pretension to heaven, is given up by man, and lost by Satan), display themselves by man taking the place of God in His temple under the most advanced form of Jewish apostasy and blasphemy. At the same time Satan acts—God having loosed his bridle— with a power (a lying power indeed, but) which gives the same testimony before men as that which the works of Christ did to the Saviour; and also with all the skill that iniquity possesses to deceive. It is in the wicked, the lawless one, that Satan works these things. Our consideration of the development of the latter part of this solemn scene will come (God willing) in the book of Revelation. We may add, that there we have this wicked one as the false Messiah, and as prophet, in the form of his kingdom—two horns like a lamb. He (Satan) had been cast down from heaven where he had been anti-priest, and now

takes up Christ's titles on earth of king and prophet. In Daniel n he is seen as king; here, as the unbridled man, and in particular as the result of the apostasy,46 and the manifestation of Satan's power. In a word, instead of the assembly, the apostasy; instead of the Holy Ghost, Satan; and, instead of the authority of God as a restraint upon evil, the unbridled man setting himself up as God on the earth.

Another circumstance, already mentioned demands particular attention. I have said that he presents himself as the Messiah (that is to say, in His two characters as king and prophet, which are His earthly characters). In heaven Satan has then nothing more to do; he has been cast out from thence, so that there is no imitation of the Lord's high-priesthood. In that respect Satan had, in his own person, acted another part. He was previously in heaven the accuser of the brethren. But, at the time of which we are speaking, the assembly is on high, and the accuser of the brethren is cast out never to return there. In a man inspired by him he makes himself prophet and king. And in this character he does the same things (in falsehood) as those by which God had sanctioned the mission of Christ before men (compare v. 9 and Acts 2:22). In Greek the words are identical.47 I would also recall here another solemn fact in order to complete this picture. In the history of Elijah we find that the proof of the divinity of Baal, or that of Jehovah, is made to rest upon the fact of their respective servants bringing down fire from heaven. Now in Revelation 13 we learn that the second beast brings down fire from heaven in the sight of men. So that we find here the marvellous works that sanctioned the Lord's mission, and there that which

proved Jehovah to be the true and only God. And Satan performs both in order to deceive men.

This may give us an idea of the state in which they will be; and it indicates also that these things will take place in relation with the Jews, under the double aspect of their connection with Jehovah and their rejection of Christ and reception of Antichrist.

Thus, thank God, the truth is abundantly confirmed, that these things do not relate to the assembly, but to those who, having had opportunity to profit by the truth, have rejected it, and loved iniquity. Neither does it relate to the heathen, but only to those among whom the truth has been set forth.48 They refused it, and God sends a he, and an efficacious lie, that they may believe it. He does this in judgment: He did the same thing with the nations (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28); He did it also with the Jews (Isa. 6:9, 10); He does it here with nominal Christians. But it does relate to the Jews as a nation that rejected the truth—the testimony of the Holy Ghost (Acts 7)— but still more to Christians (in name); in short to all those who will have had the truth presented to them.

With nominal Christians this has necessarily the character of apostasy, or at least it is connected with this apostasy, and is consequent upon it; as verse 3 teaches us, the apostasy takes place, and then the man of sin is revealed.

In connection with his character of the man of sin he presents himself without restraint in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.49 In relation to the lying power of Satan and his efficient work, he presents himself in the character of Christ—he is the Antichrist, assuming consequently a Jewish character. It is not only

the pride of man exalting itself against God, but the power of Satan in man deceiving men, and the Jews in particular, by a false Christ; so that, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived. We may remark that all these characters are precisely the opposite of Christ —falsehood instead of truth, iniquity instead of righteousness, perdition instead of salvation.

It is to a power like this, of lies and destruction that man — having forsaken Christianity and exalted himself in pride against God—will be given up. The apostasy (that is to say, the renunciation of Christianity) will be the occasion of this evil; Judea and the Jews, the scene in which it ripens and develops itself in a positive way.

The Antichrist will deny the Father and the Son (that is, Christianity); he will deny that Jesus is the Christ (this is, Jewish unbelief). With the burden upon him of sin against Christianity, grace, and the presence of the Holy Ghost, he will ally himself with Jewish unbelief, in order that there may be not only the full expression of human pride, but also for a time the satanic influence of a false Christ, who will strengthen the throne of Satan among the Gentiles occupied by the first beast to whom the authority of the dragon has been given. He will also set up his own subordinate throne over the Jews, as being the Messiah, whom their unbelief is expecting; while at the same time he will bring in idolatry, the unclean spirit long gone out who then returns to his house which is devoid of God.

And now, with regard to his destruction (whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the spirit of His mouth and destroy with the manifestation of His presence, or of His coming), the first of these means characterises the

judgment; it is the word of truth applied in judgment according to the power of God. In the Revelation, it says that the sword proceeds out of His mouth. Here He is not spoken of in the character of a man of war, as in Revelation 19. The spirit of His mouth is that inward and divine power which kindles and executes the judgment. It is not an instrument, it is the divine source of power which executes its purpose by a word (compare Isa. 30:33). But there is another aspect of this judgment. The Lord, the Man Jesus, will return. His return has two parts— the return into the air to take His assembly to Himself, and the public manifestation in glory of His return.

In the first verse of our chapter we have read of His return and our gathering together unto Him. Here, verse 8, is the manifestation of His presence publicly in creation. At the time of this public manifestation of His coming He destroys the whole work and power of the wicked one. It is the Man formerly obedient and humbling Himself on the earth, exalted of God, and become Lord of all, who destroys the lawless man that has exalted himself above everything and made himself as God, instead of being obedient to God.

This evil—on the side of Satan’s influence—was already working in the apostle’s time; only it was bridled and kept back, until that which restrained it should no longer be on the scene. Then should the wicked one be revealed. To sum up, the taking away of the assembly, and the apostasy, were first necessary; and then this man should present himself as an unbelieving Jew,50 and the power of Satan would be displayed in him.

Now this satanic influence was for those who had rejected the truth. Of the Thessalonians—to whom he had given these explanations respecting the day which they fancied was come— the apostle thought very differently. God had chosen these “brethren beloved of the Lord” from the beginning for salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, to which He had called them by Paul’s gospel (and that of his companions), and to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus. How different was this from the visitations of the day of the Lord, and the circumstances of which the apostle had spoken! They were numbered among those who should be the companions in that day of the Lord Jesus Himself.

There is nothing very particular in the apostle’s exhortations. His great concern was the explanation which we have been considering. He prays that God and the Lord Jesus Himself, who had given them the sure and everlasting consolations of the gospel, would comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work. He asks for their prayers that he may be preserved in his labours. He could not but expect to find men unreasonable and animated with enmity, for faith was not the portion of all. It was only a case for the protecting hand of God. With regard to them he counted for this end on the faithfulness of the Lord. He reckoned also on their obedience, and prays God to direct their hearts towards these two points, of which we have spoken when studying the first epistle, the love of God and the patient waiting with which the Christ waited—the two points in which the whole of christian life is summed up with regard to its objects, its moral springs. Christ Himself was waiting—sweet thought! They were

to wait with Him, until the moment when His heart and the hearts of His own should rejoice together in their meeting.

It was this which they needed. On the one hand, they had believed that the dead saints would not be ready to go and meet the Lord; on the other, they had thought the day of the Lord already come. The enjoyment of the love of God, and peace of heart in waiting for Christ, was necessary for them.

This excitement into which they had been led had also betrayed itself in some among them by their neglect of their ordinary labours, “working not at all, but being busybodies,” intermeddling in the affairs of others. The apostle had set them a very different example. He exhorts them to be firm, and to withdraw from those who would not hearken to his admonitions, but continued to walk disorderly and in idleness; not however in such a manner as to treat them as enemies, but to admonish them as brethren.

It will be observed here, that there is no longer the same expression of the energy of communion and of life as previously (compare chap. 3:16 with 1 Thess. 5:23). Nevertheless the Lord was still the Lord of peace; but the beauty of that entire consecration to God, which would shine forth in the day of Christ, does not present itself to the apostle’s mind and heart as in the first epistle. He prays for them, however, that they may have peace always and by all means.

The apostle points out the method by which he assured the faithful of the authenticity of his letters. With the exception of that to the Galatians he employed other persons to write them, but he attached his own

signature in order to verify their contents to the church, adding the prayer or blessing.

40 In the first epistle he says he needed not to speak of them, seeing that the world itself recounted everywhere the principles by which they were governed. We shall see a similar difference all through. It is no longer the same fresh energy of life.

41 See Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; where the Greek is translated “present,” in contrast with “things to come.”

42 “as God “is to be left out before “sitteth,” in chapter 2:4.

43 In 1 John 2 we find the double character of the Antichrist as regards Christianity and Judaism. He denies the Father and the Son, rejects Christianity; he denies that Jesus is the Christ, which is Jewish unbelief. His power is the working of Satan, as we find here. As man he sets up to be God. So that his impiousness is manifested in every way. As the question is more upon the earth, it is the God of the earth, the Man withal from heaven, who judges him.

44 Note this point. All was ready and complete in the apostle’s time, only restrained. So Christ was ready to judge. Only the patience of God waits, in the accepted time.

45 The principle of this may be widely at work individually, as in 1 John 2 it had begun, but the open public manifestation was to come. Jude gives the creeping in to produce corruption; John, the going out which characterises the Antichrist.

46 We may remark that the apostasy develops itself under the three forms in which man has been in relationship with God; Nature—it is the man of sin unrestrained, who exalts himself; Judaism—he sits as God in the temple of God; Christianity—it is to this that the term apostasy is directly applied in the passage before us.

47 Only the word for “miracle “or “power “is plural in Acts 2.

48 I only allude here to the connection between the renunciation of Christianity and the development of apostate Judaism, which are linked together in the rejection of the true Christ, and the denial of the Father and the Son—features given in 1 John as characteristic of the Antichrist. But I am persuaded that the more we examine the word, the more we shall see (perhaps with surprise) that this fact is confirmed. Moreover the turning back to Judaism, and the tendency to idolatry by the introduction of other mediators and patrons, and the losing sight of our union with the Head, and thus of the perfection and deliverance from the law which are ours in Christ, have, at all times, characterised the mystery of iniquity and the principle of apostasy. The apostle had incessantly to combat this. That of which we spoke above is but its full manifestation.

49 This is the culminating point in his character as an apostate who has renounced grace. The ninth and following verses develop his positive and deceitful activity by which he seeks to win men. This explains the mixture (which, moreover, generally exists) of atheism in will, and superstition.

50 I do not say that his first appearance will be the apostasy of Judaism; I do not think it will be. He will present himself to them as being the Christ, but according to the hopes and passions of the Jews. But afterwards it will be an apostasy even from Judaism, as had partially been the case in the days of the Maccabees —a fact which the Spirit uses in Daniel 11, as a figure precursive of the time of Antichrist. He is from his first appearance an unbeliever and the enemy of God, an apostate as to the assembly, and denying that Jesus is the Christ.

We are taught positively by John, that the rejection of Christianity and Jewish unbelief are united in the Antichrist.

It appears that apostasy with regard to Christianity and Jewish unbelief are connected and go together, and afterwards Jewish apostasy and open rebellion against God, which, causing the cry of the remnant, brings in the Lord, and all is ended. Now the apostle (chap. 2:3, 4) presents the complete picture of man’s iniquity, developed when apostasy from the grace of the gospel had taken place (he exalts himself even to the making himself God), without touching the Jewish side or the manifested power of Satan. These verses shew us the man of sin is the result of the apostasy which will break out in the midst of Christendom. Verse 9 begins to teach us in addition, that the coming of this wicked one is also in immediate connection with a mighty display of the energy of Satan, who deceives by means of marvellous works and a strong delusion to which God gives men up, and of which we have spoken in the text. It is man and Satan here, with enough to shew its connection with Judaism in the last days (even as the mystery of iniquity

was linked with Judaism in the days of the apostle), although it is not the occasion of giving the details of the Jewish development of the evil. We must look for these details elsewhere, where they are in their place, as in Daniel. The Apocalypse and 1 John furnish us with the means of connecting them: we do but allude here to this connection.

1 Timothy

The epistles to Timothy and Titus have naturally a peculiar bearing and character, being addressed to persons deputed by the apostle to act in his name, or to care for the churches during his absence. Their application to us is none the less direct on this account, because they not only instruct us with regard to the state of the church, and the pastoral care which the apostle bestowed on it, but the line of conduct in which Timothy is charged to lead the faithful is that which the faithful ought always themselves to follow. Nevertheless to confound the directions given to Timothy and Titus with the words addressed immediately to the faithful, would be to cast confusion upon ministry in its best sense.

A great part of this first epistle to Timothy requires but little development; not because it is without importance, but because it contains directions—so plain and simple that explanation would be superfluous—and practical exhortations which would only be obscured and their force and point taken away by attempting to enlarge upon them. On the other hand, some general principles of great importance for the position of the assembly in general are contained in this epistle.

God assumes here, in a peculiar way, the character of a Saviour-God with regard to the world: a principle of great importance in all that concerns our conversation in the world and our intercourse with men. We represent in our religious character a God of love. This was not the case in Judaism. He was indeed the same God; but there He took the character of a Lawgiver. All were indeed to

come to His temple according to the declaration of the prophets, and His temple was open to them; but He did not characterise Himself as a Saviour-God for all. In Titus we find the same expression.

In these confidential communications to his dear children in the faith, and companions in the work, we can understand that the apostle would clearly establish the great principles on which the administration committed to him rested. That all men were the objects of God's dealings in grace was the general basis on which the administration was founded—that the character of God towards the world was that of a Saviour (compare 2 Cor. 5). The law has its place and it still has it, as the apostle shews—the conviction of unrighteous men.51 But the sovereign mercy of God was the starting-point of all that the apostle had to declare. This thought, this spirit, was to govern the worship even of believers. Details follow. Notwithstanding this love to the world, there was upon the earth an assembly of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, and the witness to it on earth. The Person of Christ, and all that concerns Him, is the subject of its confession, the foundation of its existence, and the object of its faith. This faith would be assailed in the last days by the enemy, who, under the pretence of sanctity, would set himself up against God the Creator and Preserver of all men and of believers in particular. Directions for the walk of the assembly compose the remainder of the epistle. Conduct suitable to all is set before Timothy to make him, as well as ourselves, understand that which befits the assembly of God. We will now look more closely into the contents of this epistle.

From its commencement the apostle designates God as the Saviour-God. Paul is the apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour. The Lord Jesus Christ is the confidence and the hope of the soul.

We observe also that the apostle's wish differs from that which he expresses when addressing an assembly; "Grace, mercy" he says, "and peace." He does not say "mercy" to the assemblies, which stand before God as such, in consequence of the mercy shewn them, and which (however low their condition might be) are viewed as assemblies according to the nature in which they live by the Spirit, in which there is no question of mercy, because that nature is itself of God. Grace and peace are that which they are to enjoy on the part of God. But when an individual is in question, whatever his piety or faithfulness may be, he is both flesh and spirit, his career has yet in part at least to be provided for, having always need of mercy. Therefore the apostle wishes it to Timothy as well as to Titus.52 In the case of Philemon he adds "the church in thy house," and his wish has therefore no longer the personal form. But with Timothy and Titus it is the apostle's intimacy with his beloved fellow-labourers. He knew how much they needed mercy. It was his own resource, that which he had experienced for the comfort of his own soul.

The special object for which Paul had left Timothy at Ephesus, when he went into Macedonia, was that he might watch over the doctrine which was taught; but, being there, he gives him directions for the interior order of the assembly. The evil which the enemy sought to introduce, with regard to doctrine, had a twofold character; fables of human imagination, and the introduction of the law into Christianity. As to the

former, it was pure evil and edified no one. The apostle does not here say much about it; he forewarned them of the evil; and the faith of the assembly at Ephesus was sound enough to allow him to treat the whole system as mere fables and genealogies. The Spirit gave warning, that in later times it would have more disastrous consequences; but at present there was only need to guard the faithful from it as that which was worthless. Timothy was charged by the apostle to attend to this.

But that which is committed to us in Christianity, as service, is always, both in its object and its character, at the height of the eternal principles of God, and belongs to the foundation of our moral relations with Him.

The object of Paul's mandate is the love of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned, and never the subtleties of argument or of human imagination. This is a sure token for souls that are sound in the faith and guided by the Spirit of God. Speculative questions do not act on the conscience, nor bring into the presence of God. Some had forsaken these great landmarks of Christianity3 turning aside to vain discussions. And here we again find those same corrupters of Christianity, who, after having rejected the Saviour, sowed the apostle's path with thorns—Judaising teachers. They desired to inculcate the law. The human mind is adequate to this.

Now we see here the way in which one who is at the height of the truth of God can put everything in its true place. Paul treats the produce of human imagination as mere fables; but the law was of God, and could be made useful if rightly employed. It was of great service to condemn, to judge evil, to slay—to shew the judgment of

God against every wrong thing forbidden by the gospel which revealed the glory of the blessed God—a glory which tolerated no evil and which had been committed to the apostle. It could be used to act upon the conscience in this way, but it did not build up the righteous; and, if any were under the law, they were under the curse. As a sword for the conscience, it may be used. But grace alone is the source of our preaching and the stay of our souls.

These two systems and their respective places are presented in verses 5-17, which form a kind of parenthesis, the apostle resuming his address to Timothy in verse 18. The use of the law is explained in verses 8-13. The apostle in a certain sense lowers it here, while acknowledging its utility in its place, as the weapon of righteousness for condemnation, and contrasts it with the gospel which is connected with the glory of God Himself which this gospel proclaims, as the law is connected with the wickedness which it condemns.

Having spoken of the gospel of the glory which had been committed to him, the apostle turns to the sovereign grace that brought him into the knowledge of this glory which is the testimony to the accomplishment of the work of grace.

“I give thanks,” he says, “to Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer and persecutor and injurious.” This indeed was grace.

The apostle speaks of two things in his conversion: the one, how God could have compassion on him in such a state—he was in ignorance; the other, the purpose of

God that the apostle should be a pattern of grace to all. That he was in ignorance and unbelief, although a condition which made mercy possible (for had he been an enemy, knowing and willing it, while acquainted with the grace of the gospel, it would have been impossible), yet that condition was no excuse for his sin; he puts pure and perfect grace forward, as having abounded in his case—he was the chief of sinners. This indeed was true. The high priests had resisted the Holy Ghost to the uttermost. Paul had joined them in it: but he was not satisfied with that. He desired to be the active enemy of the faith wherever it existed, and to destroy the name of Jesus. He had done much at Jerusalem, but he wished to satiate his hatred even in foreign cities. We know his history in the Acts. The living expression of Jewish resistance to grace, he was also among men the expression of the most active human enmity to Him whom God would glorify. Grace was greater than the sin, the patience of God more perfect than the perseverance of man's hostility. The latter was limited by man's importance, the former has no limit in the nature of God but that of His own sovereign will. Guilty as man may be, his sin cannot so reach God as to disturb the independent action of His nature or change His purposes. He was pleased to shew forth in Paul a pattern of the sovereignty of that grace and perfect goodness— to the Jews hereafter, who as a nation will be in Saul's condition —to all men as the enemies of God and by nature children of wrath. The chief, the most active, the most inveterate of enemies was the best and most powerful of witnesses that the grace of God abounded over sin, and that the work of Christ was perfect to put it away.

“Unto God”—being such in His nature, and having the development of all the ages in His counsels—“unto the only God, invisible, incorruptible,” he ascribes all praise and all glory. Such was the foundation of Paul’s ministry in contrast with the law. It was founded on the revelation of grace; but it was a revelation connected with the experience of its application to his own case. Peter, guilty of denying a living Saviour, could speak to the Jews of grace that met their case, which was his own; Paul, formerly the enemy of a glorified Saviour and the resister of the Holy Ghost, could proclaim grace that rose above even that state of sinfulness, above all that could flow from human nature—grace that opened the door to the Gentiles according to God’s own counsels, when the Jews had rejected everything, substituting the heavenly assembly for them—grace that sufficed for the future admission of that guilty nation to better privileges than those which they had forfeited.

Such was the call of this apostle, such his ministry. Having shewn the opposition between that which was committed to him and the law (while affirming the usefulness of the latter, not as a rule to the righteous, or a guide to God’s people, but as judging wrong), he resumes his address to Timothy in that which refers to the details of his mission among the Ephesians.

At the end of chapter 1 he commits the charge to him—sends him his mandate. The term he employs relates to verses 3 and 5. He had left Timothy at Ephesus in order to command some persons there not to teach other doctrines than the truths of the gospel. Now the end of the command, of this evangelical commission, was love flowing from a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned. For the gospel, while revealing the

marvellous counsels of God, maintains the great eternal principles of His nature. It is this which distinguishes truth from the lofty pretensions of heretical imaginations; it requires that man should be in relationship with God really in heart and in truth according to those principles. And this commission the apostle now entrusted to Timothy, his own son in the faith. He was to maintain it with an authority that had its basis in divine testimony, but which he held formally from the apostle who appointed him to it; not merely of his own accord, but according to prophecies which had pointed him out for this purpose, and which were a means of strength to him in the conflict he was thus brought into. The conditions of victory were in accordance with the nature of the commission. He was to keep the faith and a good conscience. Now faith here is the doctrine of Christianity; yet not merely as doctrine, but as that which the soul held between itself and God as coming from Him. He had to maintain the truth, the christian doctrine, but to hold it as so revealed by God Himself to the soul that it should be the truth. The light should possess, with well-defined outlines, the authority of God. It was the faith, that which God had revealed, received with certainty as such—as the truth.

But, to be in communion with God, the conscience must be good, must be pure; and if we are not in communion with God, we cannot have the strength that would maintain us in the faith, that would enable us to persevere in the profession of the truth, as God gives it to us. Satan has then a hold upon us, and if the intellect of one in this state is active, he falls into heresy. The loss of a good conscience opens the door to Satan, because it deprives us of communion with God; and the active

mind, under Satan's influence, invents ideas instead of confessing the truth of God. The apostle treats the fruit of this state as "blasphemies"; the will of man is at work, and the higher the subject, the more an unbridled will, possessed by the enemy, goes astray, and exalts itself against God, and against the subjection of the whole mind to the obedience of Christ, to the authority of the revelation of God.

The apostle had delivered up two persons of this character to Satan—that is to say, outwardly. Though already deceived by him, they were not under his dominion as having power to torment and make them suffer. For in the assembly (when in its normal state) Satan has no power of that kind. It is guarded from it, being the dwelling place of the Holy Ghost, and protected by God and by the power of Christ. Satan can tempt us individually; but he has no right over the members of the assembly as such. They are within, and, weak as they may be, Satan cannot enter there. They may be delivered to him for their good. This may take place at all times—witness the history of Job. But the assembly ought to have the knowledge, and be the guardian and instrument of the accomplishment of the dealings of God with His own. Within the assembly is the Holy Ghost; God dwells in it as His house by the Spirit. Without is the world of which Satan is the prince. The apostle (by the power bestowed on him,53 for it is an act of positive power) delivered these two men into the power of the enemy— deprived them of the shelter they had enjoyed. They had listened to the enemy—had been his instruments. It was not in the assembly, with members of Christ, that this should have taken place. They must be made to feel what he was to whom they

had given ear. God thus made use of Satan himself as a rod for the good of His rebellious children. Satan should instruct them, through the pains he would make them suffer, of whatever kind it might be, whether anguish of soul or of body, and the latter is the immediate effect, in order that their will might be broken and brought into subjection to God. Solemn discipline! Marvellous power in the hands of man! but a proof that the love of God can order all things for the purpose of delivering a soul and bringing it to Himself.

The apostle proceeds to give instructions, founded on the great principles which he had established—on grace. The Jewish spirit might look on Gentile kings as enemies, and on Gentiles in general as unworthy of divine favour. The persecution of which Christians were the object gave the flesh occasion to nourish these dispositions and to enter into the spirit of the law. Grace rises above all these thoughts—all these feelings of the heart. It teaches us to think of all men with love. We belong to a Saviour-God, who acts in the gospel towards all men with love. Especially were they to pray for kings and those who had places in the world, that God would dispose their hearts to allow us to live in peace and quietness in all honesty. This was well-pleasing to a Saviour-God, who was willing that all men should be saved and be brought to know the truth. The subject here is not the counsels of God, but His dealings with men under the gospel. He acts in grace. It is the acceptable time—the day of salvation. He opens the door through the blood of Christ, and proclaims peace and a sure reception to all who come. The work is done; His character fully glorified with regard to sin. If they refuse to come, that is the will of man. That God will fulfil His

counsels after all makes no change in His dealings, nor in the responsibility of men. We have love to proclaim to all—in the spirit of love in our ways towards them. The distinction between Jew and Gentile totally disappears here. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, a Man, Christ Jesus. These are the two great truths which form the basis of all true religion. Judaism had already been the revelation and testimony in the world of the first: there was one only God. This remains eternally true, but did not suffice to bring men into relationship with God. With regard to men He abode within the veil in the darkness which shrouded His majesty. Christianity, while fully revealing the one God, presents the second truth: there is one Mediator between God and men. There is one, and there is but one. It is as true that there is but one Mediator as that there is but one God. This is the great and distinctive truth of Christianity.

Two things here characterise the Mediator. He is a man; He gave Himself a ransom for all. The time for this testimony was ordered of God. Precious truth! We are in weakness, we are guilty, we could not bring ourselves near to God. We needed a Mediator who, while maintaining the glory of God, should put us into such a position that He could present us to God in righteousness according to that glory. Christ gave Himself as a ransom. But He must be a man in order to suffer for men, and to represent men. And this He was. But this is not all. We are weak—here, where we are to receive the revelation of God; and weak, with regard to the use of our resources in God and our communion with Him—even when our guilt is blotted out. And, in our weakness to receive the revelation of God, Christ has

revealed God, and all that He is in His own Person, in all the circumstances wherein man could have need either in body or in soul. He came down into the lowest depths in order that there should be none, even of the most wretched, who could not feel that God in His goodness was near him and was entirely accessible to him—come down to him—His love finding its occasion in misery; and that there was no need to which He was not present, which He could not meet.

It is thus that He made Himself known on earth; and, now that He is on high, He is still the same. He does not forget His human experiences: they are perpetuated by His divine power in the sympathising feelings of His humanity, according to the energy of that divine love which was their source and their motive power. He is still a man in glory, and in divine perfection. His divinity imparts the strength of its love to His humanity, but does not set aside the latter. Nothing could resemble such a Mediator as this; nothing could equal the tenderness, the knowledge of the human heart, the sympathy, the experience of need. In the measure which divinity could give to what He did, and in the strength of its love, He came down, took part in all the sorrows of humanity, and entered into all the circumstances in which the human heart could be, and was wounded, oppressed, and discouraged, bowing down under the evil. No tenderness, no power of sympathy, no humanity, like His; no human heart that can so understand, so feel with us, whatever the burden may be that oppressed the heart of man. It is the Man, the Christ Jesus, who is our Mediator; none so near, none who has come down so low, and entered with divine power into the need, and all the need, of man. The conscience is purified by His

work, the heart relieved by that which He was, and which He is for ever.

There is but One: to think of another would be to snatch from Him His glory, and from us our perfect consolation. His coming from on high, His divine nature, His death, His life as Man in heaven, all point Him out as the one and only Mediator.

But there is another aspect of this truth, and of the fact that He is a Man. It is, that He is not merely a Mediator as a Priest upon His throne, between Israel and the Lord; not simply the Messiah, in order to place Israel in relationship with their God, but a Man between God and men. It is according to the eternal nature of God Himself and to the need of men in His presence. It was of these truths, eternal and of universal bearing, that Paul was the herald and the apostle.

Possessing a character that belongs to all ages and that goes beyond them, all these facts had their time to be revealed. All means dependent on man's use of them had been tried with men—and in vain, as to recalling him to God; and now the necessary foundations of their relationship with God had to be set forth, laid by God Himself, and the Gentiles were to hear the testimony of grace. And such was the apostle's testimony, "a teacher of the Gentiles in the faith and in the truth."

Paul has plainly now laid the foundations, and he proceeds therefore to details. Men were to pray everywhere, lifting up pure hands, without wrath, and without vain human reasonings. Women were to walk in modesty, adorned with good works, and to learn in silence. A woman was forbidden to teach or to exercise authority over men; she was to abide in quietness and

silence. The reason given for this is remarkable, and shews how, in our relations with God, everything depends on the original starting-point. In innocence Adam had the first place; in sin, Eve. It was Eve who, being deceived, brought in transgression. Adam was not deceived, guilty as he was of disobeying God. United to his wife, he followed her, not deceived by the enemy but weak through his affection. Without the weakness, it was this which the second Adam did in grace; He followed His deceived and guilty bride, but in order to redeem and deliver her by taking her faults upon Himself. Eve suffered on earth the penalty of her fault in a way which is a mark of the judgment of God; but walking in modesty, with faith and love and holiness, she shall be delivered in the hour of her trial; and that which bears the stamp of judgment shall be an occasion of the mercy and succour of God.

The apostle next points out to Timothy the qualities necessary for a bishop or a deacon, as well as for the wife of the latter.54 He supposes here that there were some who desired to undertake this work. It was a good work. To care for souls and have a vigilant eye upon the walk of believers; to watch over them in order that the members of Christ should answer to His love and lose no christian privilege; to do this by maintaining that happy order and that precious unity which were realised at that time, and to protect the flock of the Lord against the ravaging wolves that were seeking to invade it: this indeed was valuable work, and he on whose heart the Lord had thus laid the souls of His people might well desire to undertake it. The apostle felt this: it was a true and faithful saying; but certain qualities were needed to make any one fit for such a charge. Gifts are not

included among them, unless the being “apt to teach” might be so considered; but even this is presented as a quality—the man must have aptness55for it— not as a gift. Power to use such truth with others was very useful in fulfilling his charge, without saying at all that he taught publicly in the assembly. The essential thing was that which gave moral weight.

Timothy was not left at Ephesus to appoint elders; but these were the qualities necessary to a bishop, and Paul exhorts him to be watchful on this point. It is not needful to enter into the details of these qualities; they are plain enough, as well as those required for a deacon. We see what was the subject of “the condemnation of the devil”: he exalted himself at the thought of his own importance (compare Ezek. 28). “The snare of the devil” is another thing. If a man is not of good report, he will yield somewhere to the enemy, because he will not dare to withstand him boldly.

It will be noticed that the apostle speaks of the wives of deacons, and not those of bishops* (except to say that these must be the husbands of one wife only). Bishops had a charge, in which they were occupied with souls and exercised authority in the church, in which women were not to act. Deacons were necessarily occupied with family details and circumstances. In these women might well be concerned and often very useful. In the spiritual cares of elders they had nothing to do. It was requisite therefore that the wives of deacons should possess qualities which would cause their husbands to be respected, and at the same time guard themselves from becoming busy bodies and tale-bearers.

Faithfulness in the charge of a deacon—the exercise of which in fact is a matter of the greatest delicacy, and requires much christian love and patience—was a means of acquiring strength in the work of God. Stephen and Philip are examples of this: their spiritual powers soon carried them beyond their services as deacons.

What was the assembly in those happy days? That which surely it always is in the sight of God; but then in fact, when love displayed itself in an order maintained by the energy of the Holy Ghost, and when the oneness of the entire body developed itself in the action of all its members, it was the house of God. Thank God, it is so always; yet what a difference since then in its practical condition!

But let us here examine the character which the apostle gives to the assembly on earth. He wrote hoping soon to come, but in order that, in case he might tarry long, Timothy should know how to conduct himself. He then tells us what the assembly is.

In the first place it is the house of God. God dwells in it upon the earth (compare Eph. 2:22). We understand that it is here viewed as on the earth, because the apostle is speaking of how to behave in it. But this truth is important. It gives a character to the assembly of the highest importance for us with regard to our responsibility. It is not a vague thing, composed of the dead, of the living—a thing which we know not where to find, because one part of it is alive on the earth and another part consists of souls in heaven. It is the house of God here below, in which we have to behave (whatever other position we may hold) in a manner that becomes the house of God. God dwells in the assembly

upon earth. We cannot too earnestly remember this fact. Whatever would bring confusion into the presentation of the truth, through the idea that some are dead and that the whole assembly is not here, comes from the enemy and is in opposition to the word. The assembly, viewed as subsisting on earth, is the house of God.

In the second place it is the assembly of the living God. God in whom is the power of life, in contrast with men and with dead idols, has an assembly not of the world, having set it apart for Himself. It is not a nation like Israel. That people were the assembly of God in the wilderness. The assembly is now the assembly of the living God.

In the third place it is the pillar and support of the truth. Christ on earth was the Truth. He is so always, but He was so on the earth. He is now hidden in God. The assembly is not the truth: the word of God is the truth. His word is truth. Truth exists before the assembly; it is faith in the truth which gathers the assembly together. But the assembly is that which maintains the truth on earth.56 When the assembly is gone, men will be given up to a strong delusion.

It may be that there is only a little remnant of those that call themselves Christians who maintain the word of truth; but it is not the less true that the assembly—as long as it remains here below—is the only witness for the truth upon the earth. It is God’s witness to present the truth before men. At the end that which God owns as such will be the feeble flock at Philadelphia; and then that which is in the responsible position of being the assembly (Laodicea) will be spued out of the mouth of Christ, who Himself takes the character of Amen, the

faithful and true Witness. But the assembly as planted by God on the earth is the pillar and support of the truth. Authority is not the question here, but the maintenance and presentation of the truth. That which does not maintain and present the truth is not the assembly as God understands it.

The presence, then, of the living God, and the profession of the truth, are the characteristics of the house of God. Where-ever this assembly of the living God is, wherever the truth is, there is His house.57 The mystery of piety, which lies at the very centre of what the assembly maintains before the world, is great, and relates essentially to the Person of Christ. The apostle naturally does not here develop all the different parts of the truth, but that which is the living centre of the whole—that which is essential to the relations between God and men.

God had been manifested in the flesh; marvellous truth in fact! There, where all is confusion and sin, in the nature of him in whom all this sin and all this confusion are introduced, the Centre of all blessing, He who is Light itself, He who as the light puts everything morally in its place, and who by the fact of His presence shews that love is above everything, God who is love, has been manifest in the flesh. Where sin was, there was love above the sin. Man, who is the slave of evil, sees here in his own nature the source and the power of all good. In the centre of evil and of weakness, in human nature, God Himself has been manifested. Was there then evil in Him who was such? Did He undergo the lot of the common bondage? By no means. Truly in the same circumstances, in the same nature, He proved superior to all evil, perfect in all respects. The absence of all sin

was made evident by the power of the Holy Ghost during His whole life (if men had been able to discern it; and, in fact, it was manifest to the conscience of every man, for He was pure light shining upon all), and with power by the resurrection (compare Rom. 1:4).

Thus God was made visible to the angels, was preached to the Gentiles (not merely the God of the Jews), became the object of faith in the world (it was not the manifestation of visible power, claiming His rights and His glory), and at last took a place on high in the glory whence He had descended. It is thus that God is known in the assembly according to the truth. There is no truth outside the maintenance of this revelation of the Person of Christ.

It is worthy of notice that in this epistle, and even in the second, the apostle speaks nowhere of the relationship of Christians with God as His children, of the privileges of children, or of that which is known within the intimacy of the family. He speaks of truths that are essential as testimony before the world; that which the assembly is externally, that which it is as witness of God towards men. It is the house of God, the assembly of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth: that which it is as responsible in the world, and in order that all should learn what God is. The mystery of piety, of which the assembly is the vessel for testimony, answers to this. It is the grand essential truth on which all relation between God and men is founded, by means of which God has to do with men. Therefore also he says previously, “There is but one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

We have not here the privileges of children, nor the heavenly bride of Christ, but the foundation of God's relations with all men. Thus the Father is not named, nor even the Spirit, except here in connection with the Lord's Person, as the justification of His testimony. It is God, the Mediator, and man, and the assembly as the vessel and depositary of this truth of the testimony of God; or else evil spirits turning men away from the faith. This deserves all attention.

Not only, as we have seen elsewhere, the testimony of the grace of the gospel maintains the great eternal principles of the nature and glory of God, and His relations according to that glory with men; but even in the pains the apostle takes that the assembly may be cared for and guarded, during his absence, from the assaults of the enemy and from disorder and improprieties within; it is not of its internal privileges that he speaks. God is set before us, and the Lord Jesus Christ. God, in the majesty of His immutable truth, in His relations with men as such, and in the revelation of Himself in the flesh— God was in Christ, reconciling the world; dwelling in the assembly, in order that it should present and maintain the truth before the world—the truth (as we have seen) with regard to Christ, of the revelation of God in Him. God desires to be in relation with men: it is thus that He accomplishes it. The assembly maintains the rights of the Creator and Saviour-God on the earth. The assembly itself must be maintained in moral order, that it may confront the enemy who is in the world, and be able to sustain this testimony.

But there would be some who departed from the faith, from this knowledge of the one Creator and Saviour-God

—Him who was manifested in the flesh. They would attack precisely these points which we have named. It might be that they would pretend to carry the idea of christian privileges farther than all others had done, as well as that of profound knowledge of God; but they would sin against first principles, against the faith which connected the Saviour-God revealed in Christianity with the one only Creator-God. According to Christianity, the eternal God had not only created the world but had revealed Himself in Christ. These apostates, bringing in doctrines of demons, would seek to deny that it was this one and only God of nature who had manifested Himself in grace. Seduced by demons, and their conscience being seared, they forbade that which God had established in creation, that which He had given to man in full right after the flood: as though the superior holiness which they preached, and relationship with a more exalted God, were not consistent with such customs. Forsaking the real and practical holiness of communion with God, and of His commandments by Christ, they created a false sanctity for themselves, which denied that which God had ordained from the beginning, and thus exalted themselves against the authority of Him who had ordained it, as though He was an imperfect or perhaps evil being.

Thus the restraint of the fear of God was lost, and the door opened to licence and dissoluteness. The Spirit of God warned the assembly of this, and the faithful apostle communicates it to Timothy and through him puts the faithful on their guard. He does not therefore speak of privilege. Faithful to the glory of God, he returns to the first principles of His glory, and maintains the incontestable rights of the one and only God; faithful

to God, not making boast of his knowledge, but seeking in love to guard the assembly from all departure from God.

We must not confound the few here who forsake the faith with the general apostasy of 2 Thessalonians. Here a few depart from the truth, seduced by demons; and the assembly still subsists to be guarded from the invasion of these hurtful principles. Quite another thing is the general apostasy, and the manifestation of the man of sin, which is not mentioned here at all.

Here we have the faithfulness which repels error by truth, reminding the brethren of the latter, in order that they may not be seduced. There it is the manifestation of the one who sits in the temple of God, and who is destroyed by the brightness of the Lord's presence. Here all that had to be done was to recall in simplicity the goodness of the Creator, and that His gifts, received with thanksgiving, were always good, and not to be refused: assuredly not that they were to use them for the gratification of their lusts, but as sanctified by the word of God, which brought them to us as God's gifts, and by prayer, which connects us with God in using them. They were to be received as from Him, as the gift of His hand; and they were sanctified, as is the case with everything that comes from Him and bears the stamp of His will and His goodness. Man had forfeited everything in forsaking God: what he had he had not now with God, would eat merely as an animal, and worse as having left God. The word of God replaced the relationship in grace, and prayer used it on this footing. Here (although in other circumstances it has gone much farther) the monastic principle, in the heart and in form, is fully judged; however sincere any individual may be who

seeks to follow it in order to honour God. God does not withdraw the gifts on which man, so to speak, has seized by his will; but his use of them, instead of being the gratification of his will and lusts, is now as received from God by His will in thankfulness, and owning Him.

This in fact the apostle shews in that which follows. By teaching thus Timothy would be a good servant of Jesus Christ, nourished in the truth: bodily exercise profited little, but godliness much—both here below and for eternity; warning him again against the idle and profitless speculation of the human mind, to the danger of which he continually recurs. It is for this doctrine of God—true and worthy of all acceptation—that the apostle laboured and suffered reproach; because he had faith in the living God, who, by His providence and by His supreme power,58 governed, preserved, and took care of all men, and especially of those that believed. It was this same only God, Creator and Saviour, in whom he trusted while labouring for the Lord. Timothy was to teach this and enforce it with authority.

Afterwards, in connection with this authoritative instruction, the apostle speaks of the person and position of Timothy himself. He was young, but he was to maintain his place, and gain by his conduct that weight which years did not yet give him. He was to be an example to the believers, and occupy himself, till Paul came, with reading, exhortation, and instruction. Moreover, in his case God had given a special preparation for his work; he was not to forget or neglect it. A gift had been imparted to him: God had pointed him out to this end by prophecy; and this immediate testimony from God, to which the operation of His power was united, had been accompanied by the seal of

testimony from man, that is, that of the elders among the Christians (compare Acts 13:1-3).

Thus all things concurred to strengthen Timothy in his service, and in the authority that he exercised at that moment in place of the apostle. He should always present the weight of an irreproachable conduct, which would have its influence over hearts and consciences; but he was inwardly strengthened by the consciousness of having been formally set apart by God for the work; the gift of God had been imparted to him, and the sanction of all that had weight in the assembly had been laid, as a seal, upon him. Thus strengthened, he was to devote himself to the things of the Lord in such a manner, that his progress should be evident to all men—a demonstration of his communion with the Lord. At the same time he was to take heed to himself and to the doctrine, and that continually, which should be the means of salvation both to himself and to those who heard him.

Having thus considered the labourer, the apostle returns to the details of the work, in which Timothy was to display his diligence and watchful care. Everywhere here the subject is that which is suitable outwardly to an upright walk, that which is seemly, whether with regard to the position of individuals, or with respect to the world. The apostle speaks of elders; of widows, of that which is becoming for younger widows; of the honour due to faithful elders, those among them especially who were teachers also. There is nothing inward, nothing of the soul’s relationships to God; but everything refers to the public testimony which suited the position of men in this world before God. It is important to remark this, that although our joy lies in our heavenly privileges, in

our communion, yet we can never with impunity neglect ordinary duties or moral proprieties; we must take knowledge of the practical dangers that would beset us, owing to that which the flesh is.

We may notice that provision was made for all widows who had no relatives able to maintain them; and also that there were elders who did not teach. Against an elder, Timothy was not to receive an accusation, unless there were two or three witnesses.

All this bears testimony to the fact, that the apostle gives these directions with a view to outward order; for the maintenance of that which is respectable in the eyes of all, and of respect for all that ought to be respected. At the same time, Timothy was to be careful not to give by the laying on of hands his sanction to any one who did not offer moral guarantees that, in the position he had taken, he deserved this mark of respect from others. It would be, on Timothy's part, to become a partaker in the sins of which such a one might be guilty. He was not to lay hands hastily on any one.

Some men's sins were open, and proclaimed beforehand the judgment that awaited them. The sins of others were hidden: they would find them again at the great day. But this was a reason why he should do nothing in his charge with precipitation; he was also to keep himself pure.

Timothy's habitual temperance is here seen: weak in body, the apostle recommends him to use his liberty by taking a little wine—a pleasing instance of grace. We have here a proof of the habits of this faithful servant. The Spirit shews us how carefully he kept himself from exciting or satisfying his passions in the least thing (at

the same time that there is perfect liberty to use everything that is good when there is a true reason for it), and also the apostle's tender interest in his fellow-labourer in the gospel. It is a little parenthesis attached to the expression, "be not a partaker of other men's sins," but it has great beauty. This affectionate watchfulness became the apostle; he desired holiness in his representative, but he well knew how to respect Timothy, and to maintain the decorum which he had enjoined, and to exhibit his heartfelt tenderness. The 24th verse is connected with the 22nd.

The apostle then goes equally into detail with regard to servants, that is, slaves. They were to respect their masters, in order that the doctrine of the Lord should not be blasphemed. When the masters were believers, there was naturally more familiarity, for they were one in Christ, and thence the danger (for the flesh is crafty) that the servants might not treat their masters with the respect due to them. The apostle guards against this abuse of christian love, and of the just intimacy and confidence which ought to exist between brethren; but which, on the contrary, was a motive for the servant to render all honour to his master, by treating him with more love and with the same respect.

It was necessary that the apostle should be firm. All other instruction—all refusal to receive the wholesome words of christian doctrine, the words of Christ and the doctrine which is according to practical godliness—proceeded from the flesh, from human pride in those who wished to take advantage of godliness, and make it a means of gain. From such persons Timothy was to turn away. Godliness was indeed gain, if they were contented with what they had; and the Christian, who does not

belong to this world, if he has food and raiment, ought to be content therewith. He brought nothing into this world, and will certainly carry nothing out of it. And the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. Seduced by this covetousness, some had wandered away from christian faith, and had pierced their hearts with sorrow. The desire to be rich was the path of snares and temptation, of foolish and hurtful lusts. Timothy was to flee these things, as a man of God. This is always the thought here: he was in the world on the part of God; he represented Him for his part in the work. He was therefore to follow after other things than earthly riches —the character of a man of God—righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness: these were the things which, in man, presented God to the world and glorified Him.

Meanwhile there was conflict: he must fight the good fight of faith. If anyone represents God in the world, there must be warfare, because the enemy is there. The energy of faith was also necessary, in order to lay hold of eternal life in the midst of the seduction and difficulties which the “things that are seen” presented. God, moreover, had called Timothy to this, and he had made a good confession before many witnesses.

Finally, the apostle charges him most solemnly in the presence of God, the Source of life for all things, and of Christ Jesus who had Himself borne witness without wavering before the powers of this world, placing him under the responsibility of keeping the commandment without spot, unrebukable until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be noticed here that, as Paul had not spoken in the epistle of the privileges of the assembly, but of its responsibility, so neither does he here speak of its being caught up but of its manifestation, when the fruits of faithfulness (or of failure in it) will be gathered, and every one be in his place in the visible glory according to his work. All are like Christ, all enter into His joy; but to sit at His right and left hand in His kingdom is the portion of those for whom it is prepared by His Father, who bestows it according to the work which He has granted each to perform, giving him power to accomplish it, although in grace He reckons it as our own. Christ Himself is here viewed as the faithful man (v. 13), whom God will manifest in glory before all creatures at the time ordained in His counsels.

All here is responsibility before the world, or glory as the result of that responsibility. The supreme, invisible God is maintained in His majesty; and He presents the Lord Jesus Christ in the creation as its centre, and repositary of His glory— He who dwells in light inaccessible, whom, in His divine essence man has not seen and cannot see.

This character of the epistle is very remarkable. Nowhere else is the inaccessible majesty of God, as God, thus presented. His character is often the subject of instruction and manifestation. Here He alone has essential immortality. He dwells in inaccessible light. He is ever invisible to the eyes of men. He alone has power. He has dominion over all who reign. It is God in the abstraction of His essence, in the proper immutability of His being, in the rights of His majesty, veiled to all men.

Now Christ will be the centre of the visible glory. Having part in the divine glory before the world was, He displays, in the human nature in which He took part, this glory, which is rendered visible in Him, causing His own to participate in His joy and in all that He has in this character; but here, He is manifested by God, and in order that all should acknowledge Him.59 And it is our responsibility, faithfulness to which will be manifested in that day, which is here set before us. However small may be our share of responsibility, it is of such a God as this that we are the representatives on earth. Such is the God before whom we are to walk, and whose majesty we are to respect immediately in our conduct, and also in our relations to all that He has made.

The apostle concludes his exhortation to Timothy by engaging him to warn the rich not to rest on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. It is still the supreme and Creator-God who is before our eyes. Moreover, they were to be rich in good works, and ready to give; to be rich in those dispositions which would be of value, which would lay up a store (this is but a figure) against the time to come; and to lay hold of that which really is life. The apostle repeats his urgent exhortation to Timothy to keep that which had been committed to him, to avoid profane and vain babblings, holding fast the sound and sanctifying truth, and to have nothing to do with oppositions of human science, which pretended to penetrate into divine things as though they were subject to its knowledge. This was the origin of the fall of many with regard to christian faith.

I do not doubt that, in the manner in which the apostle here sets God before us, he refers to the foolish

imaginations to which, under the influence of the enemy, men were abandoning themselves. Thus he speaks of these with relation to the majesty of His Being as the one only God in whom is all fulness, and with regard to the sobriety of practical morality, which keeps the heart under the influence of that truth, and apart from the false and vain speculations in which the pride of man indulged itself. He maintained souls by the majesty of the only God, in the practical sobriety in which peace dwells.

Soon will the veil be drawn aside by the appearing of Jesus, whom the Almighty God will display to the world.

51 Not here, specially, that any one is under it, or that it is a rule of life for a people of God, but a rule of right and wrong to demonstrate evil to any conscience. In verse 5 we have the end of the commission of the gospel on the other hand, partaking of the divine nature—love and holiness, acting up to responsibility, a good conscience and the heart fully devoted to God, receiving His word and trusting Him.

52 There is, however, some question as to the reading in Titus.

53 We must not confound this act of power with discipline, which is the act of the assembly and its formal duty. In 1 Corinthians 5 the apostle joins the assembly to himself in this act of power, but he delivered with the power of Christ. The duty of the assembly is stated there in verse 13. As to the saints' or assembly's part, when God has exercised discipline, see 1 John 5:16; James 5:14, 15.

54 So it would read in English; but I see no reason why it should not apply to the elders' (bishops') wives. It runs

really thus, “In like manner [the] deacons.... In like manner [the] wives.”

55 Some translate this word, “ready to learn.”

56 But the assembly does not teach. Teachers teach the assembly, but by faithfulness in holding fast the truth taught, it sustains it in the world.

57 Thus, in order to judge what the assembly is, we must know and be able to distinguish the truth and the living God. It is this which the apostle says with regard to the individual, “the Spirit is truth.” These are the cardinal points with regard to unbelief and faith, the truth and the Spirit; and the word of God is the truth.

58 Compare Matthew 10:29.

59 In Revelation 19 He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Here He who is so manifests Him. So in Daniel 7. The Son of man is brought to the Ancient of days, but in the same chapter the Ancient of days comes.

2 Timothy

The second epistle to Timothy has a very peculiar character. It is the expression of his heart, who outside Palestine had, under God, founded and built the assembly of God on earth, and it was written in sight of its failure, and its departure from the principles on which he had established it. God remained faithful; His foundation was sure and immovable; but the work committed into the hands of men was already enfeebled and decaying. The consciousness of this state of things, which moreover betrayed itself in the way in which the apostle himself was then forsaken, oppressed his heart; and he pours it out into the bosom of his faithful Timothy. By this means the Spirit instructs us in the solemn truth, that the church has not kept its first estate, and sets before us the ways of safety for those who seek God, and desire to please Him, in such a state of things as this.

The apostle John gives the history of the fall of the assembly here below, and of its judgment, and that of the world likewise. He also sets before us a life which, apart from all questions of the assembly's condition, abides ever the same, which renders us capable of enjoying God, and makes us resemble Him in His nature and character.

As a witness John was to remain until the Lord came: but Paul sees for himself the ruin of that which he had built and watched over so faithfully. He had spent himself for the assembly, accomplishing that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ; and he had to see that which he had so much loved (which he had cared for

even as a mother cherishes her nursling which he had planted as God's plant on the earth) grow feeble as to its condition and testimony in the world, depart from the source of strength, and become corrupt. What a painful experience! But it is that of the servant of God in all ages and in all dispensations. He sees indeed the power of God acting to plant the testimony on earth, but he sees that men soon fail in it. The house inhabited by the Holy Ghost becomes dilapidated and in disorder. Nevertheless (and we love to repeat it with the apostle) the sure foundation of the Lord abides for ever. Whatever may be the condition of the whole company, the individual is always to depart from all iniquity, and to maintain, by himself if need be, the true testimony of the name of the Lord. This can never fail the faithful soul.

In view of the mixture and confusion which began to shew itself in the assembly, the apostle's comfort was founded on these two principles, while remembering and joyfully availing himself of the communion and faithfulness of some precious souls. He had such as Timothy and Onesiphorus, amid the afflictions of the gospel and the sorrow of being forsaken by so many who were seals to his testimony before the Lord.

The apostle begins by taking the ground of grace and of individual life—which never changes in essential character— outside church privileges. Not that these had changed; but he could no longer connect them with the general body on earth. He calls himself here an apostle according to the promise of eternal life which is in Christ Jesus. It is not merely the Messiah, it is not the head of the body, it is the promise of life which is in Him.

Paul addresses his dearly beloved son Timothy, whose affection he remembers. He desired greatly to see him, being mindful of his tears, shed probably at the time when Paul was made prisoner, or when he was separated from him on that occasion, or when he heard of it. It is the confidence of a friend that is speaking to one whose heart he knew. We see something of this, but in the perfection that was peculiar to Himself, in Jesus on the cross, in that which He said to John and to His mother. A similar form would have been unsuitable in Paul. The affections of men shew themselves in and by their wants, the wants of their hearts; those of the Lord by His condescension. With Him all is in itself perfect. With us it is only by grace that all is in its right place. But when separation to service in power, which knows but that, is over, nature according to God has its right place. In the consecrated meat-offering that was to be made with fire, honey had no place.

Verse 3. The apostle does not speak any longer of the high character of his work, but of his personal position rightly felt according to the Spirit. He had served God, following in the steps of his forefathers, with a pure conscience. In every way he was a vessel made unto honour. For more than one generation his ancestors were distinguished for a good conscience; and personal piety, founded on the truth, shewed itself in the service of God. Paul was not here expressing a judgment as to the inward condition of each generation: it was their character. He calls to mind a similar fact with regard to Timothy, in whose case however personal faith is referred to, known to Paul himself, so that the bond, though of personal feeling, was christian.60 Judaism, as to its outward obligations, is totally absent; for the

father of Timothy was a Greek, and the marriage of his Jewish mother was unclean according to the law, and would have rendered Timothy also unclean and deprived him of Jewish rights; and in fact he had not been circumcised when an infant. Paul did it, which was also not according to the law, unless Timothy had become a proselyte. Both heathens and their children were excluded, as we read in Nehemiah. Paul's act was above the law. Here he takes no notice of it; he leaves the Gentile father out of sight, and speaks only of the personal unfeigned faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother, and that of his beloved disciple himself.

The state of the assembly was only an additional occasion for the exercise of his faith, and for his zealous activity of heart and courage. Difficulties and dangers multiplied on every hand; the unfaithfulness of Christians was added to all the rest. But God is none the less with His people. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind, so that the Lord's labourer, the man of God, he who kept himself in communion with God in order to represent Him on the earth, was to stir up the gift that was in him, and (as the apostle expresses it with admirable and touching force and clearness) to endure the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. Here, in the case of Timothy, the apostle could make mention of a special gift of the Spirit, which had been conferred upon Timothy, through the laying on of hands. In the first epistle he had spoken of the prophecy which had called him or pointed him out for the possession of this gift, and told us that it had been accompanied by the laying on of the hands of the elders; here he tells us that the

laying on of his own hands was the means of bestowing it upon him.

The apostle reminds him of this proof of power and reality in his ministry (and in that of Paul himself), in view of this period when its exercise was more difficult. When all is prosperous, and the progress of the gospel is remarkable, so that even the world is struck with it, the work is found to be easy, in spite of difficulties and opposition; and—such is man —even in consequence of this opposition one is bold and persevering. But when others, Christians even, forsake the labourer, when evil and the deceptions of the enemy come in, when love has grown cold, and, because one is faithful, prudence takes alarm, and desires a less forward walk, to stand firm in circumstances like these, to persevere in the work, and maintain one's courage, is not an easy thing. We must possess Christianity with God, so that we know why we stand fast: we must be ourselves in communion with Him, in order to have the strength necessary to continue labouring in His name, and the sustainment of His grace at all times.

God then has given us the Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind; the apostle had received such a position from God, that he had been able to bestow on Timothy the gift needed for his service; but the state of spirit and soul which could use it was part of the inheritance of every Christian who leant really on God. Nor was he to be ashamed either of the testimony, which was losing outwardly its onward current in the world, nor of Paul who was now a prisoner. How precious to possess that which is eternal, that which is founded on the power and on the work of God Himself! There were indeed the afflictions of the gospel, but he should take

part in them and not shrink, enduring according to the power of God. God has saved us, has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, as though anything depended on man, but according to His own purpose and His grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. This is the sure and immovable foundation, a rock for our souls, against which the waves of difficulty break in vain, shewing a strength which we could not resist for a moment, but shewing also their total powerlessness against the purpose and work of God. The efforts of the enemy only prove that he is without strength, in the presence of that which God is, and of that which He has done for us. And the apostle identifies his ministry with this, and the sufferings he was undergoing. But he knew whom he had believed and his happiness was safe laid up with Him.

That which we have to seek is the power of the Spirit, in order that we may realise this gift of God by faith, and that we may abide, as to our hearts, as to our practical faith, in the sense of our union with Christ, upon this immutable foundation, which is nothing less than the immutability and the glory of God Himself. For His purpose has been manifested; that purpose, which gave us a place and a portion in Christ Himself, was now manifested through the appearance of that very Christ.

It is no longer a nation chosen in the world to display in it the principles of the government of God, and of His ways in righteousness, in patience, in kindness, and in power, on the earth (however unchangeable His counsels, however sure His calling), as manifested in His dealings with regard to the people whom He called.

It is a counsel of God, formed and established in Christ before the world existed, which has its place in the ways of God, outside and above the world, in union with the Person of His Son, and in order to manifest a people united with Him in glory. Thus is it a grace which was given us in Him, before the world was. Hidden in the counsels of God, this purpose of God was manifested with the manifestation of Him in whom it had its accomplishment. It was not merely blessings and dealings with God with regard to men—it was life, eternal life in the soul, and incorruptibility in the body. Thus Paul was apostle according to the promise of life.

While Christ Himself was alive, although life was in Him, this purpose of God was not accomplished with respect to us. The power of life, divine power in life, was to manifest itself in the destruction of the power of death brought in by sin and in which Satan reigned over sinners. Christ then in His resurrection has annulled death, and by the gospel has brought to light both life and incorruptibility, that is to say, that condition of eternal life which puts the soul and the body beyond death and its power. Thus the glad tidings of this work were addressed to all men. Founded in the eternal counsels of God, established in the Person of Christ, the work necessary for its fulfilment being accomplished by Him, possessing a character altogether outside Judaism, and the mere government of God in the earth, Paul’s gospel was unto all men. Being the manifestation of the eternal counsels and power of God, having to do with man as lying under the power of death, and with the accomplishment of a victory that placed man beyond that power, and in an entirely new condition which depended on the power of God and His purposes, it

addressed itself to man, to all men, Jews or Gentiles without distinction. Knowing Adam dead by sin and Christ alive in the power of divine life, he announced this good news to man—deliverance, and a totally new state of things.

It was to proclaim this gospel that the apostle had been called as a herald. It was for this he suffered, and, in the sense of what had caused it, was not ashamed to suffer. For he knew whom he had believed; he knew His power. He believed in the gospel that he preached, and therefore in the victorious power of Him in whom he believed. He could die with regard to the life that he had received from the first Adam, he could be dishonoured and put to shame in the world and by the world: life in Christ, the power by which Christ had won a place for man outside the condition of the first Adam, life as Christ now possesses it was not touched thereby. Not that life had not been there before, but death and he that had the power of death were not overcome, and all was dark beyond the closing tomb: a lightning flash might pass across the gloom, adequate ground be laid for the just conclusion of the Pharisee, but life and incorruptibility were not brought to light but in Christ and His resurrection.

But this is not all which is here expressed. The apostle does not say “in what I have believed,” but “whom”: an important difference, which places us (as to our confidence) in connection with the Person of Christ Himself. The apostle had spoken of the truth, but truth is allied to the Person of Christ. He is the truth; and in Him truth has life, has power, is linked with the love which applies it, which maintains it in the heart and the heart by it. “I know,” says the apostle, “whom I have believed.”

He had committed his happiness to Christ. In Him was that life in which the apostle participated; in Him, the power that sustained it, and that preserved in heaven the inheritance of glory which was his portion where this life was developed.

Encouraged by this hope, and committing himself to Jesus, he had endured all things for Him, and for those who were His; he had accepted all suffering here, he was ready to die daily. His happiness, in the glory of that new life, he had committed to Jesus; he laboured meanwhile in affliction, sure of finding again, without being deceived, that which he had committed to the Lord, in the day when he should see Him and all his sorrows ended. It was in the expectation of that day, in order to find it again at that day, that he had committed to Him his happiness and his joy.

Moreover, his own career would soon be finished; his eyes therefore turn towards Timothy for the welfare of the assembly here below. He exhorts him to be stedfast, to hold fast the truth, as he had taught it to him (it was the testimony of the Lord), but the truth in its realisation by faith in Christ, and according to the power of love that is found in communion with Him. It is this which, as we have seen, the apostle had realised. The truth, and living grace in Jesus, in faith and in love, which gave it its power and its value—these are, as it were, the pivots of strength and faithfulness at all times, and especially for the man of God, when the assembly in general is unfaithful.

Truth as it was taught by the apostles and expressed by them, the manner in which they presented the truth, “the form of sound words,” is the inspired expression of

that which God was pleased to reveal; and that, in all the relationships in which the truth is linked together, in all its different parts, according to the living nature and power of God, who is necessarily its centre as He is its source. Nothing except revelation could be this expression. God expresses everything as it is, and in a living way; and by His word all exists. He is the source and the centre of all things. All flow from Him— are in relation with a living Person, namely Himself, who is their source, from whom all hold their existence. This existence only subsists in connection with Him; and the relationship of all things to Him, and between themselves, is found in the expression of His mind—in that measure at least in which He puts Himself in relation with man in all these things. If evil comes in, as regards will or its consequences in judgment, it is because this relationship is broken; and the relationship that is broken is the measure of the evil.

Thus we see the immense importance of the word of God. It is the expression of the relationship of all things to God; whether as regards their existence—that is, creation—or with respect to His counsels; or even as to His own nature, and the relationship of man with Him, and the communication of life received from Him, and the maintenance of His true character. It comes from heaven as did the living Word, reveals what is there, but adapts itself, as the living Word did, to man here, directs him where there is faith here, but leads him up there where the living Word is gone as Man.

The more we consider the word, the more we shall see its importance. Analogously to Christ the living Word, it has its source on high, and reveals what is there, and is perfectly adapted to man down here, giving a perfect

rule according to what is up there, and, if we are spiritual, leading us up there: our conversation is in heaven. We must distinguish between the relationship in which man stood as child of Adam, and as child of God. The law is the perfect expression of the requirements of the former, the rule of life to him; it is found to be to death. Once we are sons of God, the life of the Son of God as man down here becomes our rule of life. “Be ye imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ hath loved us.”

In His nature, as the author of all existence, and the centre of all authority and subsistence outside Himself, God is the centre of all, and the upholder of all. As to His counsels, Christ is the centre, and here man has a peculiar place; wisdom’s good pleasure was eternally in Him, and all is to be under His feet. In order that the nature and the counsels of God should not be separated (which indeed is impossible, but what was in His counsels in order that it might not be), God became man. Christ is God made manifest in flesh, the Word made flesh. Thus the divine nature, the expression of that nature, is found in that which is the object of His counsels, that which forms their centre. Thus Christ is the truth—is the centre of all existing relationships: all have reference to Him. We are, through Him, for Him, or we are against Him; all subsist by Him. If we are judged, it is as His enemies. He is the life (spiritually) of all that enjoy the communication of the divine nature; even as He sustains all that exists. His manifestation brings to light the true position of all things. Thus He is the truth. All that He says, being the words of God, are spirit and life; quickening, acting according to grace, judging with regard to the responsibility of His creatures.

But there is yet more than this. He is the revelation of love. God is love, and in Jesus love is in action and is known by the heart that knows Him. The heart that knows Him lives in love, and knows love in God. But He is also the object in whom God is revealed to us, and has become the object of entire reliance. Faith is born by His manifestation. It existed indeed through partial revelation of this same object, by means of which God made Himself known; but these were only partial anticipations of that which has been fully accomplished in the manifestation of Christ, of the Son of God. The object is the same: formerly, the subject of promise and prophecy; now, the personal revelation of all that God is, the image of the invisible God, the One in whom the Father also is known.

Thus faith and love have their birth, their source, in the object which by grace has created them in the soul: the object in which it has learnt what love is, and with regard to which faith is exercised. By Him we believe in God. No one has ever seen God: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him.

Truth is thus revealed, for Jesus is the truth, the expression of that which God is, so as to put all things perfectly in their place, in their true relationships with God and with each other. Faith and love find the occasion of their existence in the revelation of the Son of God, of God as a Saviour in Christ.

But there is another aspect of the accomplishment of the work and of the counsels of God, which we have not yet spoken of: that is, the communication of the truth and of the knowledge of God. This is the work of the Holy Ghost, in which the truth and the life are united, for we

are begotten by the word. It is divine energy in the Deity, acting in all that connects God with the creature or the creature with God. Acting in divine perfection as God, in union with the Father and the Son, the Holy Ghost reveals the counsels of which we have spoken, and makes them effectual in the heart, according to the purpose of the Father, and by the revelation of the Person and work of the Son. I have said, divine energy, not as a theological definition—which is not my object here—but as a practical truth, for, while attributing all that regards the creature to the Father (except judgment, which is entirely committed to the Son, because He is the Son of man) and to the Son, the immediate action in creation and on the creature, wherever it takes place, is attributed to the Spirit.

The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters when this earth was formed; by His Spirit the heavens were garnished; we are born of the Spirit; sealed with the Spirit; holy men of God spake by the Spirit; gifts were the operation of the Spirit distributing to whom He would; He bears witness with our spirits; He groans in us; we pray by the Holy Ghost, if that grace is bestowed upon us. The Lord Himself, born as man in this world, was conceived by the Holy Ghost; by the Spirit of God He cast out devils. The Spirit bears witness of all things, that is to say, of all truth in the word:—the love of the Father, the nature and the glory of God Himself, His character, the Person and glory and love of the Son, His work, form the substance of His testimony, with all that relates to man in connection with these truths. The Spirit’s witness to these things is the word, and—produced by means of men— takes the shape of the truth formally set forth by revelation. Christ is the truth,

as we have seen, the centre of all the ways of God; but what we are now speaking of is the divine communication of this truth; and in this way it can be said that the word is the truth.61 But, although communicated by means of men, so that it takes a form adapted to man, its source is divine; and He who has communicated it is divine: He of whom it is said, “he shall not speak of himself” (that is to say, from Himself—apart from the Father and the Son). Consequently the revelation of the truth has all the depth, the universality of relationship, the inseparable connection with God (without which it would not be truth, for all that is separate from God is falsehood), which truth itself possesses—necessarily possesses— because it is the expression of the relationships which all things have to God in Christ; that is to say, of God’s own thoughts, of which all these relationships are but the expression. It is true that this revelation also judges all that is not in accordance with these relationships, and judges according to the value of the relationship that is broken with regard to God Himself, and the place which this relationship has in His mind.62 When this word is received through the quickening work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, it is efficacious; there is faith, the soul is in real living practical relationship with God according to that which is expressed in the revelation it has received. The truth —which speaks of the love of God, of holiness, of cleansing from all sin, of eternal life, of the relationship of children— being received into the heart, places us in real present living relationship with God, according to the force of all these truths, as God conceives them and as He has revealed them to the soul. Thus they are vital and efficacious by the Holy Ghost; and the consciousness of this revelation of the truth, and

of the truth of that which is revealed, and of really hearing the voice of God in His word, is faith.

But all this is true in the revealed word before I believe in it, and in order that I may believe in it—may believe in the truth— although the Holy Ghost alone makes us hear the voice of God in it, and so produces faith. And that which is revealed in it is the divine expression of that which belongs to the infinite on the one side, and is expressed in the finite on the other; of that which has the profoundness of the nature of God, from whom all proceeds, with whom and with whose rights all is in relationship, but which is developed—since it is outside God—in creation and in the finite.

The union of God and man in the Person of Christ is the centre—we may say (now that we know it) the necessary centre of all this, as we have seen. And the inspired word is its expression according to the perfection of God, and (we bless God for it, as the Saviour is the grand subject of the scriptures, “for,” said He, “they testify of me”) in human forms.

But this word, being divine, being inspired, is the divine expression of the divine nature, persons, and counsels. Nothing that is not inspired in this way can have this place—for none but God can perfectly express or reveal what God is— hence infinite in what flows in it; because it is the expression of, and connected with, the depths of the divine nature, and so in its connection infinite, though expressed in a finite sense, and so far finite in expression, and thus adapted to finite man. Nothing else is the divine expression of the divine mind and truth, or is in direct union with the unmixed source, even though it sprang from the same source. The immediate

connection is broken; that which is said is no longer divine. It may contain many truths, but the living derivation, the infinite, the union with God, the immediate and uninterrupted derivation from God, are wanting. The infinite is no longer there. The tree grows from its root, and forms one whole; the energy of life pervades it—the sap which flows from the root. We may consider one part, as God has set it there, as a part of the tree; we may see the importance of the trunk; the beauty of the development in its smallest details, the stateliness of the whole, in which the vital energy combines liberty and harmony of form. We see that it is a whole, united in one by the same life that produced it. The leaves, the flowers, the fruit, all tell us of the warmth of that divine Sun which developed them, of the gushing inexhaustible stream which nourishes them. But we cannot separate one part, be it ever so beautiful, from the tree, without depriving it of the energy of life and its relationship with the whole.

When the power of the Spirit of God produces the truth, it develops itself in union with its source, whether in revelation or even in the life and in the service of the individual; although in the two latter cases there is a mixture of other elements, owing to the weakness of the man. When a man’s mind apprehends the truth, and he seeks to give it a form, he does it according to the capacity of man, which is not its source; the truth as he expresses it, even were it pure, is separated in him from its source and its totality; but, besides this, the shape that a man gives it always bears the stamp of the man’s weakness. He has only apprehended it partially, and he only produces a part of it. Accordingly it is no longer the truth. Moreover, when he separates it from the whole

circle of truth in which God has placed it, he must necessarily clothe it in a new form, in a garment which proceeds from man: at once error mixes with it. Thus it is no longer a vital part of the whole, it is partial, and thereby not the truth; and it is in fact mixed with error. That is theology.

In the truth there is, when God expresses it, love, holiness, authority, as they are in Him the expression of His own relationships with man, and of the glory of His being. When man gives it a shape, all this is wanting and cannot be in it, because it is man who shapes it. It is no longer God speaking. God gives it a perfect form; that is to say. He expresses the truth in words of certainty. If man gives it a form, it is no longer the truth given of God. Therefore to hold fast the truth in the form God has given it, the type, the shape in which He has expressed it, is of all importance: we are in relationship with God in it according to the certainty of that which He has revealed. This is the sure resource of the soul, when the assembly has lost its power and its energy, and is no longer a sustainment to feeble souls; and that which bears its name no longer answers to the character given it, in the first epistle, “the pillar and support of the truth.”63 The truth, clear and positive truth, given as a revelation from God in the words—clothed with His authority—by which He has given the truth a form, communicating the facts and the divine thoughts which are necessary for the salvation of men, and for their participation in divine life—this it is which we are to hold fast.

We are only sure of the truth when we retain the very language of God which contains it. By grace I may speak of the truth in all liberty, I may seek to explain it, to

communicate it, to urge it on the conscience, according to the measure of light and spiritual power bestowed upon me; I may endeavour to demonstrate its beauty, and the connection between its various parts. Every Christian, and especially those who have a gift from God for the purpose, may do this. But the truth which I explain and propose is the truth as God has given it, and in His own words in the revelation He has made. I hold fast the form of sound words, which I have received from a divine source and authority: it gives me certainty in the truth.

And here it is important to remark the assembly's part when faithful. She receives, she maintains the truth in her own faith; she guards it, she is faithful to it, she is subject to it, as a truth, a revelation, which comes from God Himself. She is not the source of the truth. As an assembly she does not propagate it—does not teach it. She says "I believe," not "Believe." This last is the function of ministry, in which man is always individually in relationship with God by means of a gift which he holds from God, and for the exercise of which he is responsible to God. This is all-important. Those who possess these gifts are members of the body. The assembly exercises her discipline with regard to all that is of the flesh in them, in the exercise or apparent exercise of a gift, as in all else. She preserves her own purity without respect of persons as to their outward appearance, being guided therein by the word (for this is her responsibility); but she does not teach, she does not preach.

The word goes before the assembly, for she has been gathered together by the word. The apostles, a Paul, those who were scattered abroad by the persecution, a

thousand faithful souls, have proclaimed the word, and thus the assembly has been gathered out. It has been said that the assembly was before the scriptures. As regards the written contents of the New Testament, this is true; but the preached word was before the assembly. The assembly is its fruit, but is never its source. The edification even of the assembly, when it has been gathered together, comes direct from God, through the gifts which He has bestowed; the Holy Ghost distributing to each according to His will.

The scriptures are the means which God has used to preserve the truth, to give us certainty in it; seeing the fallibility of the instruments by whom it is propagated, since revelation has ceased.

If at the beginning He filled certain persons with His Spirit in such a way that error was excluded from their preaching, if besides this He then gave revelations in which there was nothing but His own word, yet as a general rule preaching is the fruit of the Holy Ghost in the heart, and its spirituality is only in measure, and there is the possibility of error. Here, whatever may be the power of the Spirit's work, we have to judge (see Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 14:29). Farther on we shall see that in forming this judgment, it is the scriptures which assure those who are led of God.

We have thus in the ways of God respecting this subject three things closely united, yet different; ministry, the assembly, and the word of God, that is, the written word; when it is not written, it belongs to the order of ministry.

Ministry—as regards the word, for this is not the only service —preaches to the world, and teaches or exhorts the members of the assembly.

The assembly enjoys communion with God, is fed, and grows by means of that with which its different members supply it. It preserves, and, in its confession, bears witness to the truth. It maintains holiness, and, by the grace and presence of the Holy Ghost, enjoys mutual communion; and, in love, cares for the temporal need of all its members.

The written word is the rule which God has given, containing all that He has revealed. It is complete (Col. 1:25). It can, because it is the truth, be the means of communicating the truth to a soul: the Holy Ghost can use it as a means; but at all events it is the perfect rule, the authoritative communication of the will and the mind of God, for the assembly.

The assembly is subject, is to be faithful, to have no will. It does not reveal, it maintains by its confession, it watches over that which it has, it does not communicate; it has received and is faithfully to keep. The man directs, that is, Christ: the woman obeys, and is faithful to her husband's thoughts—at least ought to be so (1 Cor. 11): this is the assembly. The oracles of God are committed to her. She does not give them; she obeys them.

The minister is bound individually to the same faithfulness. This we understand; and in our epistle we have especially to do with this individual responsibility. That which the assembly is in this respect is revealed in the first epistle (chap. 3:15). Here it is the individual who is to hold fast this form of sound words which he has received from a divine source, for such the apostle was, in his apostolic function, as an instrument. Neither Timothy nor the assembly could frame such a form of sound words; their part was to hold it fast, having

received it. And here, as we have said, however unfaithful the assembly may be, the individual is bound to be faithful and always to be so.

This therefore is what we have to do: the truth which is set before us in the inspired word we are (and I am) to hold fast, in the form in which it is presented to us. I am to hold it fast, not merely as a proposition, but in union with the Head, in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. Strength to fulfil comes from above. For here another point is brought before us. The Holy Ghost has been given indeed to the assembly; but a period of unfaithfulness is here contemplated (u. 15). He has been given to the man of God, to each Christian, and to each servant with reference to the service appointed him. By the Holy Ghost we are to keep the good thing that has been committed to us. In days like those, this was the duty of the man of God; and in our day, things have gone much farther. Possessing the promise of life, and forsaken by the mass of Christians, he is to hold fast the truth in the words in which it has been expressed by divine authority (this is what we have in the word, and not merely doctrine: people may say that they have the doctrine of Peter and Paul, but they cannot say that they have their words, the form of the truth as Paul and Peter gave it, elsewhere than in their writings); and he is to hold it fast in faith and love, which are in Christ. Moreover he is to keep, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the substance of the truth, that which has been given us as a treasure—the deposit of divine truth and riches, which has been given us as our portion here below.

In verses 15-18 we find that the mass had quite turned away from the apostle, so that the affection and faithfulness of one became very precious to him. What a

change already since the beginning of the gospel! Compare the Thessalonians, the Ephesians: they were the same people (for Ephesus was the capital of what is here called Asia) among whom Paul had preached, so that all Asia had heard the gospel; and see how they had all now forsaken him!

We must not however suppose that they had all abandoned the profession of Christianity; but their faith had become weak, and they did not like to identify themselves with a man who was in disgrace with the authorities, who was despised and persecuted, a prisoner—a man whose energy brought reproach and personal difficulties upon himself. They withdrew from him, and left him to answer alone for himself. Sad result of spiritual decline! But what sentiments should animate the man of God at such a moment? He must be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Christ was not changed, whatever the case might be with men; and he who suffered from their desertion could, without being discouraged, exhort his beloved Timothy to preserve steadily in the word. Nor do we find anywhere the man of God called to more full and unhesitating courage than in this epistle, which is the testimony of the failure and ruin of the assembly.

The truth was the especial treasure committed to him; and he was not only to keep it, as we have seen, but to take care that it was propagated and communicated to others after him, and perhaps still farther. That which he had heard from Paul in the presence of many witnesses (who could confirm Timothy in his convictions respecting the truth, and certify others that it was indeed what he had received from Paul) he was to communicate to faithful men, who were capable of

teaching others. This was the ordinary means. It is not the Spirit in the assembly, so that the assembly was an authority; it is no longer revelation. Timothy, well instructed in the doctrine preached by the apostle, and confirmed in his views by many other witnesses who had likewise learned of Paul, so that it was common to all as known received truth, was to take care that it should be communicated to other faithful men. Neither had this anything to do with giving them authority, with consecrating them, as has been said. It is the communication to them of the truth which he had received from Paul. This procedure shuts out the idea of the assembly as the propagator of the truth. It was the business of the faithful son in the faith of the apostle, of the ministry.

Timothy himself was not an authority either. He was an instrument for the communication of the truth, and was to enable others to be so likewise: a very different thing from being the rule of the truth. That which he had heard—and the other witnesses served as a guarantee against the introduction of anything false, or even of his own opinions, if he had been inclined to entertain them —that he was to communicate.

It is thus that, in the ordinary sense, ministry is continued; care is taken by competent persons for the communication, not of authority, but of the truth, to other faithful persons. God can raise up any one whom He chooses, and give him the energy of His Spirit; and where this is found, there is power and an effectual work: but the passage we are considering supposes the careful communication of the truth to persons fit for this work. Both principles equally shut out the idea of the communication of official authority, and the idea of the

assembly being either an authority with regard to the faith or the propagator of the truth. If God raised up whom He pleased, in whatever way He pleased, the means which He employed (when there was no special operation on His part) was to cause the truth to be communicated to individuals capable of propagating it. This is a widely different thing from bestowing authority, or the exclusive or official right to preach. And it was known revealed truth he was to communicate, that had the direct authority of revelation—what Paul's writings can alone furnish us now, or of course other inspired writings.

The apostle goes on to shew the qualities that Timothy ought to possess, in order to carry on the work amid the circumstances that surrounded him, and in which the assembly itself was found. He must know how to endure hardships, vexations, difficulties, sorrows, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; he must beware of entangling himself with the affairs of life. A soldier, when in service, could not do so, but must be free from every hindrance, that he may please the one who had called him to arms. So also, as in the lists, he must fight according to rule, according to that which became the Lord's servant and was conformable to the Lord's will. And he must labour first, that he may have a right to enjoy the fruit of his labour. These are the practical conditions of divine service for whosoever engages in it. He must endure, be unentangled in the world, fight lawfully, and labour on first64 before he looked for fruits.

The apostle returns to the elementary but fundamental principles of the truth, and to the sufferings of ministry, which moreover were in nowise a hindrance to the operations of the Spirit of God in extending the sphere

in which the truth was propagated, and the word of God made known. Nothing could restrain the power of that instrument of the work of God.

The truth of the gospel (dogma is not the subject here) was divided into two parts, of which the apostle speaks also in the epistle to the Romans: the fulfilment of the promises; and the power of God in resurrection. “Jesus Christ, of the seed of David; raised from the dead.” These, in fact, are, as it were, the two pivots of the truth. God faithful to His promises (shewn especially in connection with the Jews); and God mighty to produce an entirely new thing by His creative and quickening power, as manifested in the resurrection, which also put the seal of God upon the Person and the work of Christ.

The afflictions found in the path of service in the gospel assume here a high and peculiar character in the mind of the suffering and blessed apostle. It is participation in the sufferings of Christ, and, in the case of Paul, to a very remarkable degree. The expressions he uses are such as might be employed in speaking of Christ Himself as regards His love. As to the propitiation, naturally no other could take part in that: but in devotedness, and in suffering for love and for righteousness, we have the privilege of suffering with Him. And here what part had the apostle with these sufferings? “I endure,” He says, “all things for the elect’s sakes.” This is truly what the Lord did. The apostle trod closely on His footsteps, and with the same purpose of love—“that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” Here of course the apostle has to add, “which is in Christ Jesus”; still, the language is marvellous in the lips of any other person than the Lord Himself. For it is what Christ did.

Observe also here, that the greater the sufferings are (how small are ours on this account!) as the fruits of this love for the objects of the counsels of God, the greater is our privilege, the more do we participate in that which was the glory of Christ here below.

This thought sustains the soul in affliction of this kind: one has the same object as the Lord Himself. The energy of love in preaching the gospel addresses itself to the whole world. Perseverance, in the midst of affliction and difficulties and desertion, is sustained by the feeling that one is labouring for the accomplishment of God's counsels. One endures all things for the elect, for God's elect, in order that they may have salvation and eternal glory. This feeling was in Paul's heart. He knew the love of God, and he sought—at the cost of whatever suffering it might be in the tumultuous sea of this world—that they who were the objects of the same love should enjoy the salvation and the glory which God bestowed. This was a faithful saying, that is, that which he had just declared; for if we should die with Christ, we should also live with Him; if we should suffer, we should also reign with Him. If any denied Him, He would also deny them; the consequences of such an act remained in all their force, they were linked with the immutability of His nature and His being, and were displayed in the authority of His judgment; He could not deny Himself because others were unfaithful.

Timothy was strengthened to maintain these great principles, which belonged to the moral nature of the Lord, and not allow himself to be drawn aside by speculations which only subverted souls and corrupted the faith. He was to shew himself a workman approved of God, one who, being filled with the truth, and

knowing how to unfold it in its various parts, according to the mind and purpose of God, would not be ashamed of his work in the presence of those who might judge it. The profane and useless thoughts of human speculation he was to avoid. They could not but go on to produce ungodliness. They might have a great show of depth and height (as in the case of the assertion, that the resurrection had already taken place, which in a fleshly way went beyond all bounds with regard to our position in Christ)—these doctrines which eat like a canker. Those of whom the apostle spoke had already overthrown the faith of some, that is, their conviction as to the truth and profession of the truth. But here the soul of the apostle found its refuge in that which is immutable, be the failure of the assembly or man's unfaithfulness ever so great. The sure foundation of God remained. It had this seal: the Lord knew them that were His. This was God's side, which nothing could touch.65 The other was man's: he who professed the name of the Lord was to depart from all iniquity. This was man's responsibility, but it characterised the work and fruit of grace wherever that work was genuine and the true fruit borne.

But here we have distinct evidence of the state of things which this epistle contemplates: namely, that the outward assembly had taken quite a new character, very different from that which it had at the beginning; and that now the individual was thrown upon his personal faithfulness as a resource, and as a means of escape from the general corruption. The sure foundation of God remained—His divine knowledge of those that are His; and individual separation from all evil; but the outward assembly assumes, in the eyes of the apostle, the

character of a great house. All kinds of things are found in it, vessels of honour and vessels of dishonour, precious and vile. The man of God was to purge himself from the latter, to stand apart and not defile himself with that which was false and corrupt. This is a principle of all-importance, which the Lord has given us in His word. He allowed the evil to display itself in apostolic times, so far as to give occasion for the establishment of this principle by revelation, as that which was to govern the Christian. The unity of the assembly is so precious, it has such authority over the heart of man, that there was danger, when failure had set in, lest the desire for outward unity should induce even the faithful to accept evil and walk in fellowship with it, rather than break this unity. The principle therefore of individual faithfulness, of individual responsibility to God, is established, and set above all other considerations; for it has to do with the nature of God Himself, and His own authority over the conscience of the individual. God knoweth them that are His: Here is the ground of confidence. I do not say who are. And let those that name the name of Jesus separate themselves from all evil. Here I get what I can recognise. To maintain in practice the possibility of union between that name and evil is to blaspheme it.

The whole of that which calls itself christian is looked at here as a great house. The Christian is of it outwardly, in spite of himself; for he calls himself a Christian, and the great house is all that calls itself christian. But he cleanses himself personally from every vessel which is not to the Lord’s honour. This is the rule of christian faithfulness; and thus personally cleansed from fellowship with evil, he shall be a vessel unto honour fit for the Master’s use. Whatsoever is contrary to the

honour of Christ, in those who bear His name, is that from which he is to separate himself.

Discipline for individual faults is not the subject here, nor the restoration of souls in an assembly that has in part lost its spirituality; but a line of conduct for the individual Christian in respect of that which dishonours the Lord in any way.

These instructions are solemn and important. That which makes them needful is sorrowful in its nature; but it all helps to exhibit the faithfulness and grace of God. The direction is plain, and precious when we find ourselves in similar circumstances. Individual responsibility can never cease.

When the Holy Ghost acts energetically and triumphs over the power of the enemy, these individuals who are gathered together in the assembly develop their life in it according to God and His presence, and the spiritual power which exists in the whole body acts upon the conscience, if needed, and guides the heart of the believer: so that the individual and the assembly flow on together under the same influence. The Holy Ghost, who is present in the assembly, sustains the individual at the height of God’s own presence. Strangers even are obliged to confess that God is there. Love and holiness reign. When the effect of this power is no longer found in the assembly, and by degrees Christendom no longer answers to the character of the assembly as God formed it, yet the responsibility of the individual to God has not ceased on that account. It can never either cease or diminish, for the authority and the rights of God Himself over the soul are at stake.

But in a case like this, that which calls itself Christian is no longer a guide, and the individual is bound to conform himself to the will of God, by the power of the Spirit, according to the light he has from it.

God may gather the faithful together. It is grace on His part; it is also His mind. But individual responsibility remains—responsibility not to break the unity, feeble as it may be, wherever it is possible according to God: but responsibility to preserve the divine character of Christianity in our walk, and to respond to the revelation we have received of His nature and of His will.

By purging himself from all those who are unto dishonour, the servant of God shall be unto honour, sanctified and prepared for every good work. For this separation from evil is not merely negative; it is the effect of the realisation of the word of God in the heart. I then understand what the holiness of God is, His rights over my heart, the incompatibility of His nature with evil. I feel that I dwell in Him and He in me; that Christ must be honoured at all costs; that that which is like Him alone honours Him; that His nature and His rights over me are the only rule of my life. That which thus separates me unto Him, and according to what He is, separates me thereby from evil. One cannot walk with those who dishonour Him, and, at the same time, honour Him in one’s own walk.

That which follows shews the sanctifying character of this exhortation. The apostle says, “Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” This is to breathe the pure atmosphere which is found in the Lord’s presence; in which the soul enjoys health and

strength. All that corrupts is far away. And, further, we find, what is so often contested, that we can and are to distinguish those who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart. We do not decide who are the Lord's: He knows them. But we are to associate ourselves with those who manifest themselves, such as call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Those I am to know, own, and walk with. The statement that I cannot know who these are, is in defiance of an express rule of scripture, applicable to a state where, through corruption, many who may possess Christianity are not so manifested.

As we find throughout these epistles, the apostle exhorts to avoid vain questions, in which there is no divine instruction. They only produce barren discussions and strife; and the servant of the Lord is not to strive. He comes, on God's part, to bring the truth in peace and love. He is to maintain this character in the expectation that God, in His grace, will give repentance to those who oppose (for it is the heart and conscience that are in question), that they may acknowledge the truth.

The truth of God is not a thing of human understanding; it is the revelation of that which God is, and of His counsels. Now we cannot have to do with God without the heart and conscience being engaged. It is not the revelation to us of God, if this is not the case. Christians are brought into connection with the divine Being Himself, and in acts which ought to have the most powerful effect on the heart and conscience; if they do not, both the one and the other are in a bad state and hardened. The Spirit of God, no doubt, acts on the understanding and by it; but the truth lodged in it is addressed to the conscience and to the heart, and if these are not reached by the truth, nothing is done. Nor

indeed is anything really understood till they are. For in divine truth things are understood before words, as “born again” (compare John 8:43). On the other hand, by means of error, by occupying the mind with the error, Satan shuts God out of it, and leads the whole man captive, so that he does the will of that enemy to the soul.

Now this evil influence would too surely be exercised. The power of the holy truth of God would be lost in the assembly and among Christians; and those who bore this name would become (under the influence of the enemy) the expression of the will and passions of man, while still maintaining the forms of godliness; a peculiar condition, which betrays in a remarkable way the influence and the work of the enemy. This was to be expected; and they would be perilous days.

The open opposition of the enemy is doubtless a painful thing, but he deceives souls by the specious appearances of which the apostle here speaks—that which bears the name of Christianity, that which before men has the character of godliness, and which the flesh will accept as such much more readily than that which, because it is true godliness, is contrary to the flesh. Nevertheless all the worst features of the human heart are linked with the name of Christianity. What then does the testimony become? It is, so to speak, an individual prophecy, clothed in sackcloth.

There is activity in this perilous evil of the last days: these deceivers would creep into houses, and gain the ear of feeble souls, who, governed by their passions, are ever learning yet never learn. Teachers like these resist the truth, they are men of corrupt minds, reprobate as

to the faith; but they shall proceed no farther. God will make manifest their folly and their falseness by means even of their own pretensions, which they can no longer maintain.

The man of God is to turn away from such men, while they are yet deceiving and exercising their influence. God will expose them in due time. All will then judge them, and condemn their pretensions; the spiritual man does so while they are deceiving the others in security.

We may remark here that which evidences the sad and dangerous character of the days of which the apostle is speaking. If we compare the lists of sins and abominations, which Paul gives at the beginning of the epistle to the Romans, as characterising heathen life and the moral degradation of men during those times of darkness and demon-worship, with the catalogue of sins that characterise those who have the form of godliness, we shall find that it is nearly the same, and morally quite the same; only that some of the open sins which mark the man who has no outward restraint are wanting here, the form of godliness precluding them and taking their place.

It is a solemn thought, that the same degradation which existed among heathens is reproduced under Christianity, covering itself with that name, and even assuming the form of godliness. But in fact it is the same nature, the same passions, the same power of the enemy, with but the addition of hypocrisy. It is only the departure from, and corruption of, the true doctrine of the Mediator; as Paganism was that of the true doctrine of the only God.

Different directions are given for the conduct of the man of God, with regard to the vessels unto dishonour, and the men who act in the spirit of the last days. From the former he is to purge himself: he is to think of faithfulness in his own walk; and by cleansing himself from those vessels which do not honour the name of Christ, which (although in the great house) do not bear the stamp of a pure desire for His glory, he shall be a vessel unto honour, fit for the Master's use. By keeping apart from such vessels, he is sheltered from the influences that impoverish and degrade the testimony he has to render to Christ; he is pure from that which deteriorates and falsifies that testimony.

In the other case—that of the men who gave the character of "perilous" to the last days, the corrupt opposers of the truth, bearing the name of godliness—with regard to these his testimony is to be distinct and plain. Here he is not merely to cleanse himself; he testifies his moral abhorrence, his loathing, of those who, being the instruments of the enemy, bear this character of formal piety. He turns away from them, and leaves them to the judgment of God.

Timothy had the walk and spirit of the apostle for his pattern. He had been much with him; he had seen, in times of trial, his patience and his sufferings, the persecutions he had endured; but the Lord had delivered him out of all. It would be the same with all who sought to live according to godliness, which is in Christ Jesus:66 they should endure persecution. Evil men and seducers would wax worse and worse, deceiving others, and being, at the same time, deceived themselves.

The character of the last days is strongly marked here, and gives no hope for Christianity as a whole. The progress of evil is described as developing itself in two distinct characters, to which we have already alluded. The great house—Christendom as a whole—in which there are vessels to dishonour, from which we are to purge ourselves, and the positive activity of corruption, and of the instruments who propagate it and resist the truth, although they who corrupt themselves assume the form of godliness. Under this last aspect the wicked will go on growing worse and worse; nevertheless the hand of God in power will demonstrate their folly.

We may distinguish, in this second category, the general character of pride and corruptness in all who submit to this malignant influence, and those who themselves labour to extend it. Of the latter of this class, the apostle says, are they who creep into houses. The character is that of the mass who are seduced; but there are seducers. These resist the truth, and their folly shall be manifested. It may be that God may demonstrate it, wherever there is faithfulness, in order to save His own from it; but, in general, their evil work will go on, and the seduction grow worse and worse, until the end, when God will make manifest the folly of those who have departed from Him, and given themselves up to the errors of the human mind, and laboured to maintain and propagate them.

The apostle then tells Timothy of the safeguard on which he may rely to preserve himself, through grace, stedfast in the truth, and in the enjoyment of the salvation of God. Security rests upon the certainty of the immediate origin of the doctrine which he had received; and upon the scriptures received, as authentic and inspired

documents, which announced the will, the acts, the counsels, and even the nature of God. We abide in that which we have learnt, because we know from whom we have learnt it. The principle is simple and very important. We advance in divine knowledge, but (so far as we are taught of God) we never give up, for new opinions, that which we have learnt from an immediately divine source, knowing that it is so. By a source immediately divine, I mean, a person to whom God Himself has communicated the truth by revelation with authority to promulgate it. In this case I receive what he says (when I know him to be such) as a divine communication. It is true that the scriptures always remain as a counter proof, but when— as in the case of the apostles—a man is proved to be the minister of God, gifted by Him for the purpose of communicating His mind, I receive what he says in the exercise of his ministry as coming from God. It is not the assembly that is in view in this case. It cannot be the vessel of divine truth directly communicated to it from God. Individuals are always that. We have seen that its part is to confess the truth when communicated, not to communicate it. But we here speak of a person to whom and by whom God immediately reveals the truth—such as the apostles and prophets. God has communicated to them, as elect vessels for this purpose, that which He desired to communicate to the world, and they have so communicated. None could do it who had not received it himself from God as a revelation: if this is not the case, the man himself has some part in it. I could not then say, “I know of whom I have learnt it,” as knowing that it came immediately from God and by divine revelation.

When God had something to communicate to the assembly itself, He did it by means of such persons as Paul, Peter, etc. The assembly is composed of individuals; it cannot receive a divine revelation in a mass, as the assembly, except it be by hearing in common a divine voice, which is not God's way. The Holy Ghost distributes to every one, severally as He will. There are prophets, and the Spirit says, "Separate unto me Barnabas and Paul." Christ has given gifts to men, some apostles, some prophets, etc. Accordingly the apostle says here, not "where," but "of whom" thou hast learnt these things.

Here, then, is the first foundation of certainty, strength, and assurance for the man of God with regard to divine truth. It has not been revealed to him immediately. It was Paul and other instruments, whom God chose for this special favour. But he knows of whom he has learnt it; even of one (here it was Paul) to whom it had been directly made known by inspiration, and who has authority from God to impart; so that they who learn of him know that it is divine truth, exactly as God communicated it (compare 1 Cor. 2), and in the form in which He was pleased to communicate it.

There is another means, which has a character of its own; the scriptures, which are as such the foundation of faith to the man of God, and which direct him in all his ways. The Lord Jesus Himself said (speaking of Moses), "If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? "His words were the words of God; He does not contrast the authority of what He said with that of the written word, but the means of communication. God has been pleased to employ that means as a permanent authority. Peter says "No prophecy of scripture…" There

have been many prophecies which are not written; they had the authority of God for those persons to whom they were addressed. For the word speaks more than once of prophets—who must therefore have prophesied—without communicating their prophecies to us. They were instruments for making known the will of God, at the moment, in order to guide His people in their actual circumstances, without its being a revelation necessary to the people of God at all times, or applicable either to the world, to Israel, or to the assembly in all ages. It was not a general and permanent revelation from God for the instruction of the soul at all periods.

A multitude of things, spoken by Jesus Himself, are not reproduced in the scriptures; so that it is not only a question of from whom we have heard a truth, but also of the character of that which has been communicated. When it is for the permanent profit of the people or the assembly of God, God caused it to be written in the scriptures, and it abides for the instruction and the food of His children in all ages.

The expression, “knowing of whom thou hast learned them,” establishes us on personal apostolic authority, viewing the apostles as teachers authorised by the Lord. John says, “They who are of God hear us.” It is not necessary that scripture should be written by apostles; God has made known therein His will and the truth, and has committed the sacred deposit to His people for the profit of all ages. The scriptures have authority as such. And it is not that which, as a spiritual man, one may receive from them, that by which we have profited (as to application to one’s soul that is indeed all); but it is the entire holy scripture, such as we possess it, which has this authority.

From his childhood Timothy had read the holy scriptures; and these writings, such as he had read them as a child, guarded him—as divine authority—against error, and furnished him with the divine truths needful for his instruction. To use them aright, faith in Christ was requisite: but that which he used was the scripture known from his youth. The important thing to observe here is that the apostle is speaking of the scriptures, as they are in themselves, such as a child reads them; not even of that which a converted or spiritual man finds in them, but simply the holy writings themselves.

It may perhaps be said, that Timothy as a child possessed only the Old Testament. Agreed: but what we have here is the character of all that has a right to be called holy scripture. As Peter says as to the writings of Paul, these, “They wrest, as they do also the other scriptures.”67 From the moment that we acknowledge the New Testament as having a title to that name, its writings possess the same character and have the same authority as the Old Testament.

The scriptures are the permanent expression of the mind and will of God furnished as such with His authority. They are His expression of His own thoughts. They edify, they are profitable: but this is not all—they are inspired. It is not only that the truth is given in them by inspiration. It is not this which is here stated. They are inspired.

The greater part of the New Testament is comprised in the first source of authority, “knowing of whom thou hast learnt them,” namely, all that which the apostles have written; because, in learning the truth therein, I can say I know from whom I have learnt it—I have learnt

it from Paul, or from John, or from Peter, etc. But, besides this, being received as scriptures, they have the authority of divine writings, to which, as a form of communication, God has given the preference above the spoken word. They are the permanent rule by which every spoken word is to be judged.

In a word the scriptures are inspired. They teach, they judge the heart, they correct, they discipline according to righteousness, in order that the man of God may be perfect, that is, thoroughly instructed in the will of God, his mind formed after that will and completely furnished for every good work. The power for performing these comes from the actings of the Spirit. Safeguard from error, wisdom unto salvation, flow from the scriptures; they are capable of supplying them. We are to abide in that which we have learnt from the apostles, and to be governed by the writings of God.

Does this perfect and supreme authority of the scriptures set aside ministry? By no means; it is the foundation of the ministry of the word. One is a minister of the word; one proclaims the word—resting on the written word—which is authority for all, and the warrant for all that a minister says, and imparting to his words the authority of God over the conscience of those whom he teaches or exhorts. There is, in addition to this, the activity of love in the heart of him who exercises this ministry (if it be real), and the powerful action of the Spirit, if he be filled with the Holy Ghost. But that which the word says silences all opposition in the heart or mind of the believer. It was thus that the Lord answered Satan, and Satan himself was reduced to silence.

He who does not submit to the words of God thereby shews himself to be a rebel against God. The rule given of God is in the scriptures; the energetic action of His Spirit is in ministry, although God can equally act upon the heart immediately by the word itself. Nevertheless ministry, since the revelations of God were completed, could not be an authority, or there would be two authorities; and if two, one must be a needless repetition of the other, or else, if they differed, no authority at all.

If the revelations were not complete, no doubt there might be more. The Old Testament left untold the history of Christ, the mission of the Holy Ghost, the formation of the assembly; because these facts not being yet accomplished could not be the subject of its historical and doctrinal instructions, and the assembly was not even the subject of prophecy. But all is now complete, as Paul tells us that he was a minister of the assembly to complete the word of God (Col. 1:25). The subjects of revelation were then completed.

Observe, that the apostle insists, as a matter of responsibility, that Timothy should devote himself to his ministry with so much the more energy that the assembly was declining, and self-will in Christians was gaining the ascendancy; not that he throws any doubt upon its being a constant duty to do so at all times, whether happy or unhappy. The apostle, as we have seen, has two different periods in view; the decline of the assembly, which had already begun, and the still worse condition that was yet future. The special application of the exhortation here is to the first period, “Be instant,” he says, “in season, out of season… for the time will come when they will not endure sound

doctrine… and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

In how positive and distinct a way the apostle sets the fall of the assembly before us! Its impaired condition in his day was to him but a point of progress (according to his judgment in the Spirit) towards a yet more entire fall; when, although still calling itself christian, the mass of those who assumed the name of Christ would no longer endure the sound doctrine of the Holy Ghost. But, come what might, labouring with patience and diligence and energy as long as they would hearken, he was to be watchful, to endure afflictions, to seek after souls still unconverted (a great proof of faith when the heart is burdened with the unfaithfulness of those within), and fully to exercise his ministry; with this additional motive, that apostolic energy was disappearing from the scene (chap. 4:6).

But there is yet something to notice at the beginning of this chapter. Fulness of grace, it is apparent, does not here characterise the epistle. His exhortation to Timothy is "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick and dead at his appearing and his kingdom." We have already spoken of this: the appearing of Jesus is in connection with responsibility; His coming is with the object of calling us to Himself in connection with our privileges. Here it is the first of these two cases; not the assembly, or the Father's house, but God, the appearing, and the kingdom. All that is in relation to responsibility, government, judgment, is gathered together in one point of view. The apostle however is not speaking of the assembly, nor does he throughout the epistle. The assembly moreover as such is not judged; she is the bride of the Lamb. Individuals are judged. Christendom

which bears its name and responsibility, and necessarily so while the Holy Ghost is here below, is judged. We are warned of it in Ephesus (Rev. 2). Nay, judgment begins there. This is the assembly viewed as the house, not the body.

The portion of the assembly, and even of its members as such, is grace and not judgment. She goes to meet the Lord before His appearing. Here the apostle speaks of His appearing and His kingdom. It is as appearing in glory and clothed with the authority of the kingdom that He exercises judgment. The presentation of the assembly to Himself completes the work of grace with regard to that assembly. When the Lord appears, we shall appear with Him in glory; but it will be the glory of the kingdom (as we see in the transfiguration), and He will judge the living.

He will maintain the authority of His kingdom, as a new order of things, for a long period; and judgment will be exercised, if the occasion for it arises, during its whole continuance, for a king shall reign in righteousness; judgment and righteousness will be united. Before giving back this kingdom to God the Father, He judges the dead, for all judgment is committed to the Son. So that the kingdom is a new order of things founded on His appearing, in which judgment is exercised. The kingdom is founded by the exclusion of Satan from heaven. It is established and its authority put in exercise at the appearing of the Lord.

The consciousness that this judgment is going to be exercised gives an impulse to love in the carrying out of ministry, gives it earnestness, and strengthens the hands

by the sense of union with Him who will exercise it and also by the sense of personal responsibility.

The apostle uses his near departure as a fresh motive to exhort Timothy to the full exercise of his ministry. His own heart expands at the thought of that departure.

The absence therefore of apostolic ministry, so serious a fact with regard to the assembly's position, makes the duty of the man of God the more urgent. As Paul's absence is a motive for working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, so is it also a motive for him who is engaged in the work of the gospel to devote himself more than ever to his ministry, in order to supply as far as possible the lack of apostolic service by earnest care for souls, and by instructing them in the truth that he has learnt.

We cannot be apostles, or lay the foundation of the assembly. This is already done. But we may build upon that foundation by the truth which we have received from the apostle, by the scriptures which God has given us, by an unwearied love in the truth for souls. The foundation is not to be laid a second time. We give its value to the foundation, we give it its place, by building upon it, and by caring for the souls and the assembly, to which apostleship has given an ever-abiding place and foundation before God. This is what we have to do in the absence of the gift that lays the foundation.

The character that God appointed has already been stamped on the work: the one foundation has been laid. The assembly has its one and sole place according to the counsels of God. The rule given of God is in the word. We have but to act as the apostle leads according to the impulse already given by the Spirit. We cannot have

apostolic authority: no one is an apostle in any such sense. This could not be, because we do not lay the foundation; it would be to deny that which has already been done. The foundation has been laid. We can labour according to the measure of our gift; and so much the more devotedly, in proportion as we love the work which the apostle wrought and because he is no longer here to sustain it.

As to the apostle, he had finished his work; if others were unfaithful, he had been faithful. In the good fight of the gospel of God he had fought to the end, and successfully resisted all the attacks of the enemy. He had finished his course: it only remained for him to be crowned. He had kept the faith committed to him. The crown of righteousness, that is to say, the one bestowed by the righteous Judge who acknowledged his faithfulness, was laid up and kept for him. It was not till the day of retribution that he would receive it. We see plainly, that it is reward for labour and for faithfulness that is here meant. This—or its opposite—characterises the whole epistle, and not the privileges of grace.

The work of the Spirit through us is rewarded by the crown of righteousness, and every one will have a reward according to his labour. Christ brings us all according to the grace of God into the enjoyment of His own glory to be with Him and like Him. This is our common portion according to the eternal counsels of God; but a place is prepared by the Father and given by the Son according to the work wrought by the power of the Spirit in each believer in his particular position. It is not Paul only who will receive this crown from the righteous Judge; all who love the Lord’s appearing will appear with Him in the glory that is personally destined

to each, and that is adjudged to him when the Lord appears. Detached from this world, sensible that it is a perverse and rebellious one, feeling how much the dominion of Satan burdens the heart, the faithful long for the appearance of Him who will put an end to that dominion, to rebellion, oppression and misery, by bringing in— in His goodness, although by judgment— deliverance, peace, and freedom of heart, on the earth.

The Christian will share the Lord's glory when He shall appear: but this world also will be delivered.

We see here too that the privileges of the assembly as such are not the subject, but the public retribution manifested when Jesus shall appear to all; and the public establishment of His glory. The heart loves His appearing; not only the removal of evil, but the appearance of Him who removes it.

In that which follows we see what progress the evil had already made, and how the apostle counts upon the individual affection of his dear son in the faith. Probably there were good reasons for the departure of many, certainly for that of some; nevertheless it is true that the first thing that presents itself to the apostle's mind is the departure of Demas from purely worldly motives. The apostle felt himself isolated. Not only had the mass of Christians abandoned him, but his companions in labour had gone away. In the providence of God he was to be alone. He begs Timothy to come soon. Demas had forsaken him. The rest, from various motives, had quitted him; some he had sent away in connection with the work. It is not said that Demas had ceased to be a Christian—had publicly renounced the Lord; but it was not in his heart to bear the cross with the apostle.

In the midst of these sorrows a ray of grace and light shines through the darkness. The presence of Mark—whose service Paul had formerly refused, because he had shrunk from the perils of labouring among the Gentiles and had turned back to Jerusalem—is now desired by him, because he was useful for the ministry. It is most interesting to see, and a touching proof of the grace of God, that the afflictions of the apostle and the work of grace in Mark combine to set before us, as faithful and useful to Paul, the one who once had failed, and with whom the apostle would then have nothing to do. We also see the affections and confidence displayed in the smallest details of life. Full of power by the Spirit of God, the apostle is gentle, intimate, and confiding, with those who are upright and devoted. We see too that at the close of his life, devoted as he was, the occasion had presented itself for study (in connection assuredly with his work), and for writing that which he wished carefully to preserve—possibly his epistles.

This has an important place in scriptural instruction with regard to the life of the apostle. Paul was lost, so to speak, for the greater part, in the power of the Spirit; but when alone, with sober mind, he occupies himself intelligently and carefully about the things of God.

He warns Timothy with regard to a man who had shewn his enmity, and puts him on his guard against him. We see here also that the epistle bears the character of righteousness, grace having had its course. “The Lord,” he says, “reward him according to his deeds.” As for those who had not courage to stand by him, when he had to answer as a prisoner, he only prays for them. He had not been discouraged. His heart, broken by the unfaithfulness of the assembly, was strong in confessing

the Lord before the world, and he can testify that, if forsaken by men, the Lord Himself stood with him and strengthened him. That he had to answer before the authorities was but an occasion to proclaim again in public that for which he was made a prisoner. Glorious power of the gospel where faith is in exercise! All that the enemy can do becomes a testimony, in order that the great, kings, those who were otherwise inaccessible, should hear the word of truth, the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The faithful witness was also delivered out of the lion's mouth. His strong and simple confidence counted on the Lord to the end. He would preserve him from every evil work unto His heavenly kingdom.

If the time of his departure was at hand, if he had to fall asleep instead of being changed, he had not ceased to be among those who looked for the Lord's appearing. Meanwhile he was going to be with Him, to have a place in the heavenly kingdom.

He salutes the brethren with whom Timothy was connected, and begs him to come before the winter. We also learn here, that the miraculous power granted to the apostles was exercised in the Lord's service, and not for their private interests, nor as their personal affection might suggest; for Paul had left Trophimus sick at Miletus.

It is evident that this epistle was written when the apostle thought his departure near at hand, and when the faith of Christians had grievously declined, which was proved by their having forsaken the apostle. His faith was sustained by grace. He did not hide from himself that all was going wrong: his heart felt it—was

broken by it; he saw that it would grow worse and worse. But his own testimony stood firm; he was strong for the Lord through grace. The strength of the Lord was with him to confess Christ, and to exhort Timothy to so much the more diligent and devoted an exercise of his ministry, because the days were evil.

This is very important. If we love the Lord, if we feel what He is to the assembly, we feel that in the latter all is in ruin. Personal courage is not weakened, for the Lord remains ever the same, faithful, and using His power for us: if not in the assembly which rejects it, it is in those who stand fast that He will exercise His power according to the individual need created by this state of things.

May we remember this. Insensibility to the state of the assembly is not a proof that we are near the Lord, or that we have confidence in Him; but in the consciousness of this ruin, faith, the sense of what Christ is, will give confidence in Him amidst the ruin which we mourn. Nevertheless it will be observed, that the apostle speaks here of the individual, of righteousness, of judgment, and not of the assembly. If the latter is spoken of outwardly as the great house, it contains vessels to dishonour, from which we are to purge ourselves. Yet the apostle foresaw a still worse state of things—which has now set in. But the Lord can never fail in His faithfulness.

The first of Timothy gives directions for the order of the assembly; the second, for the path of the servant of God when it is in disorder and failure.

60 It is indeed the basis of the exhortation of verse 6. When the faith of so many is giving way, he turns to the

personal confidence which his heart had in Timothy, nourished up through grace by the atmosphere he had lived in.

61 Hence also it is said (i John 5), “The Spirit is truth.”

62 This is true as regards guilt. But God, being perfectly revealed, and that in grace as the Father and the Son, our apprehension of the ruin in which we are, goes deeper far than the sense of guilt as the breach of previously existing relationships. We were guilty according to our place as men. But we were without God in the world, and (when God is known) this is awful. The beginning of Romans treats the question of guilt; Ephesians 2, the state we were in; John 5:24 briefly resumes grace as to both. The relationship now is an entirely new one, founded on purpose, redemption, and our being children of God.

63 The doctrines or dogmas of scripture have their importance and their adaptation to the simplest soul in this, that they are facts, and so objects of faith, not notions. Thus Christ is God, Christ is man, the Holy Ghost is a Person, and the like, are facts for faith, realised in the simplest soul.

64 Read “The husbandman must labour before partaking.”—2 Tim. 2:6.

65 This, while a profound source of comfort, is a proof of decline; for men ought to know who are the Lord’s too. It is not, ‘ The Lord added daily to the assembly such as should be saved.”

66 We get the difference of the state of things in this case also. It is not all Christians who will be persecuted, but all who will live godly in Christ Jesus.

67 This too is the real sense of Romans 16:26, where we should read, “by prophetic writings.”

Titus

The epistle to Titus is occupied with the maintenance of order in the churches of God.

The especial object of those written to Timothy was the maintenance of sound doctrine, although speaking of other things with regard to which the apostle gives directions for the conduct of Timothy. This the apostle himself tells us. In the first epistle to Timothy we see that Paul had left his beloved son in the faith at Ephesus, in order to watch that no other doctrine was preached there; the assembly is the pillar and support of the truth. In the second epistle we find the means by which Christians are to be strengthened in the truth, when the mass have departed from it.

Here, in Titus, the apostle says expressly that he had left him in Crete to set in order things that were yet wanting, and to establish elders in every city. Although more or less the same dangers presented themselves to the mind of Paul as when writing to Timothy, yet we find that the apostle enters at once upon his subject, with a calmness which shews that his mind was not pre-occupied in the same way with those dangers, and that the Spirit could engage him more entirely with the ordinary walk of the assembly; so that this epistle is much more simple in its character. The walk that becomes Christians, with regard to the maintenance of order in their relationships to each other, and the great principles on which this walk is founded, form the subject of the book. The state of the assembly comes but little before us. Truths that flow more entirely from the christian revelation, and that characterise it, have more

place in this epistle than in those addressed to Timothy. On the other hand, prophecies concerning the future condition of Christianity, and the development of the decline that had already commenced, are not repeated here. While stating in a remarkable way certain truths with respect to Christianity, the tone of the epistle is more calm, more ordinary.

The promise of life is particularly spoken of here as well as in Timothy. Moreover this promise distinguishes Christianity, and the revelation of God (as the Father) in Christ, from Judaism.

But in this epistle the great boundaries of Christianity are set forth at the outset. The faith of the elect, the truth which is according to godliness, the promise before the world began of eternal life, and the manifestation of the word of God through preaching, are the subjects of the introduction. The title of “Saviour” is here, as in Timothy, added to the name of God as well as to that of Christ.

This introduction is not without importance. That which it contains is presented to Titus by the apostle as characterising his apostleship, and as the special subject of his ministry. It was not a development of Judaism, but the revelation of a life and of a promise of life which subsisted (that is, in Christ, the object of the divine counsels) before the world was. Accordingly faith was found, not in the confession of the Jews, but in the elect brought by grace to the knowledge of the truth. It was the faith of the elect: this is an important truth, and that which characterises faith in the world. Others may indeed adopt it as a system; but faith is in itself the faith of the elect.

Among the Jews this was not the case. The public confession of their doctrine, and confidence in the promises of God, belonged to every one who was born an Israelite. Others may pretend to the christian faith; but it is the faith of the elect. Its character is such that human nature neither embraces it nor conceives it, but finds it to be a stumbling-stone. It discloses a relationship with God, which to nature is inconceivable and at the same time presumptuous and insupportable. To the elect it is the joy of their soul, the light of their understanding, and the sustainment of their heart. It places them in a relationship with God which is all that their heart can desire, but which depends entirely on that which God is; and this the believer desires. It is a personal relationship with God Himself; therefore it is the faith of God's elect. Hence also it is for all the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

This faith of God's elect has an intimate character in relation to God Himself. It rests on Him, it knows the secret of His eternal counsels—that love which made the elect the object of His counsels. But there is another character connected with it, namely, confession before men. There is the revealed truth by which God makes Himself known, and claims the submission of man's mind and the homage of his heart. This truth places the soul in a true relationship with God. It is truth according to godliness.

The confession of the truth therefore is an important character of Christianity, and of the Christian. There is in the heart the faith of the elect, personal faith in God and in the secret of His love; and there is confession of the truth.

Now that which formed the hope of this faith was not earthly prosperity, a numerous posterity, the earthly blessing of a people whom God acknowledged as His own. It was life eternal, promised of God in Christ before the world was, outside the world and the divine government of the world and the development of the character of Jehovah in that government.

It was eternal life. It is in connection with the nature and with the character of God Himself; and, having its source in Him, proceeding from Him, it was the thought of His grace, and declared to be such in Christ, before a world existed into which the first man was introduced in responsibility (his failure in which is his history up to Christ the second Man, and the cross in which He bore its consequences for us, and obtained that eternal life for us in its full glory with Himself), and which was the sphere of the development of God's government over that which was subject to Him—a very different thing from the communion of a life by which one participates in His nature, and which is its reflection. This is the hope of the gospel (for we are not speaking of the assembly here), the secret treasure of the faith of the elect, of which the revealed word assures us.

"Promised before the world began" is a remarkable and important expression. One is admitted into the thoughts of God before the existence of this changing and mingled scene, which bears witness of the frailty and sin of the creature—of the patience of God, and His ways in grace and in government. Eternal life is connected with the unchangeable nature of God; with counsels which are as abiding as His nature, with His promises, in which He cannot deceive us, and to which He cannot be unfaithful. Our portion in life existed before the

foundation of the world, not only in the counsels of God, not only in the Person of the Son, but in the promises made to the Son as our portion in Him. It was the subject of those communications from the Father to the Son, of which we were the objects, the Son being their depositary.68 Marvellous knowledge which has been given us of the heavenly communication of which the Son was the object, in order that we might understand the interest which we have in the thoughts of God, of which we were the objects in Christ before all the ages!

That which the word is becomes also more clear to us through this passage. The word is the communication, in time, of the eternal thoughts of God Himself in Christ. It finds man under the power of sin, and reveals peace and deliverance, and it shews how he can have part in the result of God's thoughts. But these thoughts themselves are nothing else than the plan, the eternal purpose, of His grace in Christ, to bestow on us everlasting life in Christ—a life which existed in God before the world was. The word is preached, manifested (that is, the revelation of the thoughts of God in Christ). Now those thoughts gave us eternal life in Christ; and this was promised before the ages. The elect, believing, know it, and possess the life itself. They have the witness in themselves; but the word is the public revelation on which faith is founded, and which has universal authority over the consciences of men, whether they receive it or not. Just as in 2 Timothy 1:9, 10, it is presented as salvation, but then made manifest.

It will be observed that faith here, is faith in a personally held, known, truth; a faith which only the elect can have, who possess the truth as God teaches it. "The faith" is used also for Christianity as a system in contrast with

Judaism. Here it is the secret of God in contrast with a law promulgated to an outward people. This promise, which dated from before the revealed ages, and which was sovereign in its application, was especially committed to the apostle Paul that he might announce it by preaching. To Peter the gospel was committed more as the fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers, which Paul also recognises, with the evangelical events that confirmed and developed them by the power of God manifested in the resurrection of Jesus, the witness of the power of this life. John presents life more in the Person of Christ and then imparted to us, the characteristic fruits of which he sets forth.

We shall find that the apostle has not the same intimacy of confidence in Titus as in Timothy. He does not open his heart to him in the same way. Titus is a beloved and faithful servant of God and also the apostle's son in the faith; but Paul does not open his heart to him in the same manner—does not communicate to him his anxieties, his complainings—does not pour out his soul to him—as he did to Timothy. To tell of all one sees that is heart-breaking and disquieting in the work one is engaged in—that is the proof of confidence. One has confidence with regard to the work, and one speaks of it with regard to oneself, with regard to all, and there is no restraint, no measuring how far one ought to speak of oneself, of what one feels, of all things. This the apostle does with Timothy, and the Holy Ghost has been pleased to portray it for us. In writing to Timothy doctrine above all occupied the apostle's mind: by its means the enemy wrought and endeavoured to ruin the assembly. Bishops only come into mind as an accessory thing. Here they have a primary place. Paul had left Titus in Crete to set

in order the things that were yet wanting, and to ordain elders in every city, as he had already commanded him. It is not here a question of the desire any one might have to become a bishop, nor (in that view) of describing the character suitable to this charge, but of appointing them; and for this task Titus was furnished with authority on the apostle's part. The necessary qualifications are made known to him, in order that he might be able to decide according to apostolic wisdom. So that on the one hand he was invested by the apostle with authority to appoint them, and on the other hand instructed by him with respect to the requisite qualifications. Apostolic authority and wisdom concurred to render him competent to perform this grave and important work.

We see also that this apostolic delegate was authorised to set in order that which was necessary to the welfare of the assemblies in Crete. Already founded, they yet needed directions with regard to many details of their walk; and apostolic care was requisite to give them these, as well as for the establishment of functionaries in the assemblies. This task the apostle had committed to the approved fidelity of Titus, furnished with his own authority by word of mouth and here in writing; so that to reject Titus was to reject the apostle and consequently the Lord who had sent him. Authority in the assembly of God is a serious thing—a thing that proceeds from God Himself. It can be exercised through influence by the gift of God; by functionaries, when God establishes them by instruments whom He has chosen and sent for this purpose.

It is not necessary here to enter upon the detail of qualifications that were needed to fill the office of bishop

suitably. They are, in the main, the same as those mentioned in the epistle to Timothy. They are qualities, not gifts; qualities—outward, moral, and circumstantial—that proved the fitness of the individual for the charge of watching over others. It may perhaps occasion surprise that the absence of gross misconduct should have a place here; but the assemblies were more simple than people think, and the persons of whom they were composed had but recently come out from the most deplorable habits; and therefore a previous conduct that commanded the respect of others was necessary to give weight to the exercise of the office of superintendence. It was also needful that he who was invested with this charge should be able to convince gainsayers. For they would have to do with such, especially among the Jews, who were always and everywhere active in opposition to the truth, and subtle in perverting the mind.

The character of the Cretans occasioned other difficulties, and required the exercise of peremptory authority; Judaism mingled itself with the effect of this national character. It was needful to be firm and to act with authority, that they might continue sound in the faith.

Moreover, he had still to speak concerning ordinances and traditions, those evil plagues in the church of God which provoke Him to jealousy, and which, by exalting man, are opposed to His grace. One thing was not pure, another was forbidden by an ordinance. God claims the heart. To the pure all things are pure; for him whose heart is defiled it needs not to go out of himself to find that which is impure; but convenient, in order to be able to forget what is within. The mind and conscience are already corrupt. They talk of knowing God, but in their

works they deny Him, being unprofitable and reprobate as regards every work really good.

Titus, who was not only to appoint others for the purpose, but, being there clothed with authority, was himself to watch over the order and moral walk of the Christians, was charged (as is the case throughout these three epistles) to see that every one, according to his position, walked in agreement with moral and relative propriety—an important thing, and which shelters from the attacks of Satan, and from confusion in the assembly. True liberty reigns in the assembly; moral order secures this; and the enemy finds no better occasion to dishonour the Lord and ruin the testimony and throw all into disorder, thus giving the world occasion to blaspheme, than the forgetfulness of grace and holy order among Christians. Let us not deceive ourselves: if these proprieties are not maintained (and they are beautiful and precious), then the liberty (and it is beautiful and precious, and unknown to the world, who are ignorant of what grace is), the excellent liberty of the christian life, gives room for disorder which dishonours the Lord and throws moral confusion into everything.

Often, in perceiving that the weakness of man has given occasion to disorder where christian liberty reigns, instead of seeking the true remedy, men have destroyed the liberty; they banish the power and operation of the Spirit—for where the Spirit is, there is liberty in every sense—the joy of the new relationships in which all are one. But, while severing every bond for the Lord’s sake when necessary, the Spirit recognises every relationship which God has formed; even when we break them—as death does—through the exigency of the call of Christ,

which is superior to them all. But while we are in them (the call of Christ apart), we are to act suitably to the relationship. Age and youth, husband and wife, child and parent, slave and master, all have their own proprieties to maintain towards each other, a behaviour in accordance with the position in which we stand.

“Sound doctrine “takes account of all this, and, in its warnings and exhortations, maintains all these proprieties. This is the instruction which the apostle here gives to Titus, with regard to aged men, aged women, young women (relatively to their husbands, their children, and their whole life, which should be domestic and modest); young men, to whom Titus was to be always a pattern; slaves, with their masters; and then the duties of all towards magistrates, and indeed towards all men. But, before taking up this last point, he establishes the great principles which are the foundation of the conduct of the saints amongst themselves in this world. Their conduct towards magistrates and the world has a different motive.

The conduct of Christians, as such, in the assembly has for its basis and motive the special doctrines of Christianity. We find these doctrines and motives in chapter 2:11-15, which speaks of that conduct. The particular motive for the character of their walk, with regard to the world, we find in the third and following verses of chapter 3. {Tit 2:11-15}

Chapter 2:11-15 contains a remarkable summary of Christianity, not exactly of its dogmas, but as a practical reality for men. Grace has appeared. It has appeared, not limited to a particular people, but to all men; not charged with temporal promises and blessings but

bringing salvation. It comes from God to men with salvation. It does not expect righteousness from men, it brings salvation to those that need it. Precious and simple truth, which makes us know God, which puts us in our place, but according to the grace which has overleaped every barrier in order to address itself, in the sovereign goodness of God, to every man on the earth!

Having brought this salvation, it instructs us perfectly with regard to our walk in this world; and that in relation to ourselves, and to other men, and to God. Renouncing all ungodliness, and all lusts that find their gratification in this world, we are to bridle the will of the flesh in every respect and to live soberly; we are to acknowledge the claims of others and to live righteously; we are to own the rights of God over our hearts and to exercise godliness.

But our future also is enlightened by grace. It teaches us to wait for the blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Grace has appeared. It teaches us how to walk here below, and to expect the appearing of the glory in the Person of Jesus Christ Himself. And our hope is well founded. Christ is justly precious to us. We can have full confidence of heart in thinking of His appearing in glory, as well as the most powerful motive for a life devoted to His glory. He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify for Himself a people who should belong to Him in His own right, and be zealous—according to His will and His nature—of good works.

This is what Christianity is. It has provided for all, the past, the present, and the future, according to God. It delivers us from this world, making of us a people set

apart for Christ Himself, according to the love in which He gave Himself for us. It is purification, but a purification which consecrates us to Christ. We belong to Him as His peculiar portion, His possession in the world; animated with the love that is in Him, in order to do good to others and bear testimony to His grace. This is a precious testimony to that which Christianity is, in its practical reality, as the work of the grace of God.

With respect to the conduct of Christians towards the world, grace has banished violence, and the spirit of rebellion and resistance which agitates the heart of those who believe not, and which has its source in the self-will that strives to maintain its own rights relatively to others.

The Christian has his portion, his inheritance, elsewhere; he is tranquil and submissive here and ready to do good. Even when others are violent and unjust towards him, he bears it in remembrance that once it was no otherwise with himself: a difficult lesson, for violence and injustice stir up the heart; but the thought that it is sin, and that we also were formerly its slaves, produces patience and piety. Grace alone has made the difference, and according to that grace are we to act towards others.

The apostle gives a grievous summary of the characteristics of man after the flesh—that which we once were. Sin was foolishness—was disobedience; the sinner was deceived—was the slave of lusts, filled with malice and envy, hateful, and hating others. Such is man characterised by sin. But the kindness of God, of a Saviour-God, His good-will and charity towards men (sweet and precious character of God!)69 has appeared.

The character that He has assumed is that of Saviour, a name especially given Him in these three epistles, in order that we should bear its stamp in our walk, that it should pervade our spirit. Our walk in the world and our conduct towards others depend on the principles of our relationships with God. That which has made us different from others is not some merit in ourselves, some personal superiority: we were sometime even as they. It is the tender love and grace of the God of mercy. He has been kind and merciful to us: we have known what it is, and are so to others. It is true that in cleansing and renewing us this mercy has wrought by a principle, and in a sphere of a life, that are entirely new, so that we cannot walk with the world as we did before; but we act towards others who are still in the mire of this world, as God has acted towards us to bring us out of it, that we might enjoy those things which, according to the same principle of grace, we desire that others also should enjoy. The sense of what we once were, and of the way in which God has acted towards us, combine to govern our conduct towards others.

Now when the kindness of a Saviour-God appeared, it was not something vague and uncertain; He has saved us, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy by washing and renewing us. This is the double character of the work in us, the same two points which we find in John 3 in the Lord’s discourse with Nicodemus; except that here is added that which has now its place because of the work of Christ, namely, that the Holy Ghost is also shed on us abundantly to be the strength of that new life of which He is the source. The man is washed, cleansed. He is washed from his former habits, thoughts, desires, in the

practical sense. We wash a thing that exists. The man was morally bad and defiled in his inward and outward life. God has saved us by purifying us; He could not do it otherwise. To be in relationship with Himself there must be practical purity.

But this purification was thorough. It was not the outside of the vessel. It was purification by means of regeneration; identified with the communication of a new life no doubt, which is the source of new thoughts, in connection with God's new creation, and capable of enjoying His presence and in the light of His countenance, but which in itself is a passage from the state we were in into a wholly new one, from flesh by death into the status of a risen Christ.

But there was a power which acted in this new life and accompanies it in the Christian. It is not merely a subjective change, as they say. There is an active divine Agent who imparts something new, of which He is Himself the source—the Holy Ghost Himself. It is God acting in the creature (for it is by the Spirit that God always acts immediately on the creature); and it is in the character of the Holy Ghost that He acts in this work of renewal. It is a new source of thoughts in relationship with God; not only a vital capacity, but an energy which produces that which is new in us.

It has been a question, When does this renewal by the Holy Ghost take place? Is it at the commencement, or is it after the regeneration70 of which the apostle speaks? I think that the apostle speaks of it according to the character of the work; and adds "shed on us" (that which characterises the grace of this present period) to shew that there is an additional truth, namely, that the

Holy Ghost, as “shed on us,” continues in order to maintain by His power the enjoyment of the relationship into which He has brought us. The man is cleansed in connection with the new order of things; but the Holy Ghost is a source of an entirely new life, entirely new thoughts; not only of a new moral being, but of the communication of all that in which this new being develops itself. We cannot separate the nature from the objects with regard to which the nature develops itself, and which form the sphere of its existence and characterise it.

It is the Holy Ghost who gives the thoughts, who creates and forms the whole moral being of the new man. The thought and that which thinks cannot be separated, morally, when the heart is occupied with it. The Holy Ghost is the source of all in the saved man: he is ultimately saved, because this is the case with him.

The Holy Ghost does not only give a new nature; He gives it us in connection with an entirely new order of things (“a new creation”), and fills us as to our thoughts with the things that are in this new creation. This is the reason, that, although we are placed in it once for all, this work—as to the operation of the Holy Ghost—continues; because He ever communicates to us more and more of the things of this new world into which He has brought us. He takes of the things of Christ and shews them to us; and all that the Father has is Christ’s. I think that the “renewing of the Holy Ghost” embraces all this; because He says, “which he has shed on us abundantly.” So that it is not only that we are born of Him, but that He works in us, communicating to us all that is ours in Christ.

The Holy Ghost is shed on us abundantly by means of Jesus Christ our Saviour, in order that, having been justified by the grace of this Saviour, we should be heirs according to the hope of eternal life. I think that the antecedent of “that,” v. 7, is “the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost”; and that the sentence, “which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour,” is an accessory parenthesis introduced to shew us that we have the fulness of the enjoyment of these things by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Thus He has saved us by this renewing that we may be heirs according to the hope of eternal life. It is nothing outward, earthly, or corporeal. Grace has given us eternal life. In order to this, we have been justified by the grace of Christ. Thus there is energy, power, hope, through the rich gift of the Holy Ghost. In order to our participating in it we have been justified by His grace, and our inheritance is in the incorruptible joy of eternal life.

God has saved us, not by works—nor by means of71 anything that we are, but by His mercy. But then He has acted towards us according to the riches of His own grace, according to the thoughts of His own heart.

With these things the apostle desires that Titus should be occupied—with that which brings us with thanksgiving into practical connection with God Himself and makes us feel what our portion is, our eternal portion, before Him. This acts upon the conscience, fills us with love and good works, makes us respect all the relationships of which God Himself is the centre. We are in relationship with God according to His rights; we are

before God, who causes everything that He has Himself established to be respected by the conscience.

Idle questions and disputes on the law Titus was to avoid, together with everything that would destroy the simplicity of our relationship with God according to the immediate revelation of Himself and of His will in Jesus Christ. It is still the Gnostic Judaism setting itself up against the simplicity of the gospel; it is the law and human righteousness, and that which, by means of intermediate beings, destroys the simplicity and the immediate character of our relationship with the God of grace.

When a man tried to set up his own opinions, and by that means to form parties in the assembly, after having admonished him once and a second time, he was to be rejected; his faith was subverted. He sins, he is judged of himself. He is not satisfied with the assembly of God, with the truth of God: he wants to make a truth of his own. Why is he a Christian, if Christianity, as God has given it, does not suffice him? By making a party for his own opinions he condemns himself.

We have, at the end of the epistle, a little glimpse of the christian activity which the love of God produces, the pains taken that the flock should enjoy all the help with which God supplies the assembly. Paul wished that Titus should come to him: but the Cretans needed his services; and the apostle makes the arrival of Artemas or Tychicus (the latter well known by the services he had rendered to Paul) the condition of the departure of Titus from the field in which he was labouring. We find too that Zenas, a lawyer, and Apollos, who had also displayed his active zeal at Ephesus and Corinth, were

disposed to occupy themselves in Crete with the work of the Lord.

Observe also that we have the two kinds of labourers: those who were in personal connection with the apostle as fellow-labourers, who accompanied him, and whom he sent elsewhere to continue the work he had begun, when he could no longer carry it on himself; and those who laboured freely and independently of him. But there was no jealousy of this double activity. He did not neglect the flock that were dear to him. He was glad that any who were sound in the faith should water the plants which he himself had planted. He encourages Titus to shew them all affection, and to provide whatever they needed in their journey. This thought suggests to him the counsel that follows; namely, that it would be well for Christians to learn how to do useful work in order to supply the wants of others as well as their own.

The apostle ends his epistle with the salutations that christian love always produces; but, as we saw at the beginning, there is not here the same expansion of heart that we find in Paul's communications to Timothy. Grace is the same everywhere; but there are special affections and relationships in the assembly of God.

68 Compare Proverbs 8:30, 31, and Luke 2:14, and Psalm 40:6-8, "hast thou opened "being really, "thou hast dug ears for me "—that is, prepared a body, the place of obedience, or a servant (Phil. 2); so translated by LXX, and accepted in Hebrews as just.

69 In Greek it is the word philanthropy, which is here used in speaking of God; and which moreover has much greater force than the English word, because phil is an especial affection for anything, a friendship.

70 The Greek word here used is not being born again. It is used, besides this passage, only in the end of Matthew 19 for the millennium. The renewing of the Holy Ghost is a distinct thing from the regeneration. This last is a change of one state of things to another.

71 Here, as everywhere, the responsibility of man and God’s saving grace, by which purpose also is accomplished, are clearly distinguished.

Philemon

The very beautiful and interesting epistle to Philemon does not require much comment; it is an expression of the love which works by the Spirit within the assembly of God in all the circumstances of individual life.

Written for the purpose of awakening in Philemon sentiments which certain events had a tendency to extinguish in his heart, this epistle is suited to produce those feelings in the reader more than to be the object of explanation.

It is a fine picture of the way in which the tenderness and the strength of the love of God, working in the heart, occupies itself with every detail wherein that love might be wounded, or that might be an occasion for its growth and manifestation. In this point of view the epistle is as important as beautiful; for this development of tender and delicate consideration in the midst of the apostle’s gigantic labours, and of the immense truths that formed the basis of relationship between all creatures and God in Christ, gives a very peculiar character to Christianity and shews its divine nature; since He who reveals the most profound truths, and puts them in their right place in the circle of divine thought, does so as speaking of a known thing, as communicating His own thoughts; and can (being the Spirit of the God of love) fill the heart with considerations which love only can suggest, with a dignity which manifests their source, and with a delicacy of application which shews that, whatever be the grandeur of His thoughts, He is at liberty to consider everything.

When the human mind is occupied with elevated subjects, it feels their weight, and bends under the load; it is absorbed; it has to abstract itself, to fix its attention. God reveals His own thoughts; and, vast as they may be to the human mind, they flow with the clearness and connectedness that is natural to them, when He communicates them by His chosen instruments. The latter are free to love; for the God who employs them and inspires them is love. It is a more essential part of their task to present Him thus, than even to speak of the deep things. Accordingly, when they are moved by that love, the character of Him who sends them is demonstrated as that of the God who is the source of love, by a perfect consideration for others, and the most delicate attention to those things which their hearts would feel.

Moreover this love develops itself in relationships formed by the Holy Ghost Himself, between the members of the body of Christ, that is to say, between men. Springing from a divine source, and always fed by it, christian affections assume the form of human regard, which, by exhibiting love and the opposite of selfishness, bear the stamp of their origin. Love, free from self, can and does think of all that concerns others and understand what will affect them.

Onesimus, a fugitive slave, had been converted by means of Paul in his bonds. Philemon, a rich man or at least one of easy fortune, received the assembly in his house (his wife being also converted), and in his measure laboured himself in the Lord’s work. Archippus was a servant of the Lord, who ministered in the assembly, perhaps an evangelist; at any rate he took

part in the conflicts of the gospel, and was thus associated with Philemon and the assembly.

The apostle, in sending Onesimus back, addresses the whole assembly. This is the reason that we have here, “grace and peace,” without the addition of “mercy,” as when individuals only are addressed by the apostles. His appeal on behalf of Onesimus is to Philemon; but the whole assembly is to interest itself in this beloved slave, who was become a child of God. Their christian hearts would be a support and a guarantee for the conduct of Philemon; although the apostle expects pardon and kindness for Onesimus from the love of Philemon himself as a servant of God.

Paul (as was his custom) recognises all the good that was in Philemon, and uses it as a motive to Philemon himself, that he might let the feelings of grace flow out freely, in spite of anything that the return of Onesimus might excite in the flesh or any displeasure that Satan might try to re-awaken in him. The apostle would have that which he desired for Onesimus to be Philemon’s own act. The enfranchisement of his former slave, or even his kind reception as a brother, would have quite a different bearing in that case, than if it had arisen from a command on the apostle’s part; for christian affection and the bonds of love were in question. He gives due weight to the right he had to command, but only in order to abandon it, and to give more force to his request; and at the same time he suggests that the communion of Philemon’s faith with the whole assembly of God and with the apostle—that is, the way in which his faith connected him, in the activities of christian love, with the assembly of God and those appointed by him to labour in it, and with the Lord Himself—which had

already shewn itself so honourably in Philemon, would have its full development in the acknowledgment of all the apostle's rights over his heart. In verse 6 we must read "every good thing which is in us."

It is beautiful to see the mixture of affection for Onesimus— which shews itself in an anxiety that makes him plead every motive which could act on the heart of Philemon—with the christian feeling that inspired him with full confidence in the kindly affections of this faithful and excellent brother. The return of his fugitive slave was indeed likely to stir up something in his natural heart; the apostle interposes his letter on behalf of his dear child in the faith, born in the time of his captivity. God had interposed the work of His grace, which ought to act on the heart of Philemon, producing altogether new relationships with Onesimus. The apostle beseeches him to receive his former slave as a brother, but it is evident (v. 12), although Paul wished it to be the spontaneous act of the master whom Onesimus had wronged, that the apostle expected the affranchisement of the latter. Be that as it may, he takes everything upon himself for his dear son. According to grace Onesimus was more profitable to Philemon, as well as to Paul, than formerly, when the flesh had made him an unfaithful and valueless servant; and this he should rejoice in (v. 11). Paul alludes to the name of "Onesimus," which means "profitable." Finally, he reminds Philemon that he was indebted to him for his own salvation—for his life as a Christian.

Paul at this moment was a prisoner at Rome. God had brought Onesimus there (whither all resorted) to lead him to salvation and the knowledge of the Lord, in order that we should be instructed, and that Onesimus should

have a new position in the christian assembly.72 It was apparently towards the end of the apostle's imprisonment. He hopes at least soon to be released and tells Philemon to prepare him a lodging.

We find the names again in the epistle to the Colossians. There the apostle says, "Onesimus, who is one of you"; so that, if it be the same, he was of Colosse. It seems likely, because there is Archippus also, who is exhorted to take heed to his ministry. If it be so, the fact that he speaks thus of Onesimus to the Christians at Colosse is another proof of his loving care for this new convert. He lays him thus upon the hearts of the assembly, sending his letter by him and Tychicus. In the epistle to the Ephesians there are no salutations; but the same Tychicus is its bearer. Timothy is joined with Paul in the address of the epistle to the Colossians, as well as in this to Philemon. It was not so in the epistle to the Ephesians; but in that to the Philippians, to whom the apostle hoped to send Timothy ere long, their two names are again united.

I do not draw any conclusions from these last details; but they furnish ground for inquiry into details. Each of the four epistles was written during the apostle's captivity at Rome, and when he was expecting to be delivered from that captivity.

Finally, that which we have especially to remark in the epistle to Philemon is the love which, in the intimate centre of this circle (guarded all round by an unparalleled development of doctrine) reigned and bore fruit, and bound the members of Christ together, and spread the savour of grace over all the relationships in which men could stand towards each other, occupying

itself about all the details of life with a perfect propriety, and with the recognition of every right that can exist among men and of all that the human heart can feel.

72 It seems to me, from the way in which the apostle speaks, that he even thought Onesimus would be an instrument of God in the assembly, useful in the Lord’s service. He would have retained him to minister to himself in the bonds of the gospel; but he respects his connection with Philemon. It was also much better for the soul of Onesimus that he should submit himself where he had done wrong; and if he was to be free, that he should receive his freedom from the love of Philemon.

Hebrews

The important nature of the epistle to the Hebrews demands that we should examine it with peculiar care. It has its own very distinct place. It is not the presentation of christian position in itself, viewed as the fruit of sovereign grace, and of the work and the resurrection of Christ, or as the result of the union of Christians with Christ, the members of the body with the Head—a union which gives them the enjoyment of every privilege in Him. It is an epistle in which one who has apprehended indeed the whole scope of Christianity, considered as placing the Christian in Christ before God, whether individually or as a member of the body, looks nevertheless at the Lord from here below; and presents His Person and His offices as between us and God in heaven, while we are in feebleness on earth, for the purpose of detaching us (as walking on earth) from all that would attach us in a religious way to the earth; even when—as was the case among the Jews—the bond had been ordained by God Himself.

This epistle shews us Christ in heaven, and consequently that our religious bonds with God are heavenly, although we are not yet personally in heaven ourselves nor viewed as united to Christ there. Every bond with the earth is broken, even while we are walking on the earth.

These instructions naturally are given in an epistle addressed to the Jews, because their religious relationships had been earthly, and at the same time solemnly appointed by God Himself. The heathen, as to their religions, had no formal relationships except with demons.

In the case of the Jews this rupture with the earth was in its nature so much the more solemn, the more absolute and conclusive, from the relationship having been divine. This relationship was to be fully acknowledged and entirely abandoned, not here because the believer is dead and risen again in Christ, but because Christ in heaven takes the place of all earthly figures and ordinances. God Himself, who had instituted the ordinances of the law, now established other bonds, different indeed in character; but it was still the same God.

This fact gives occasion for His relationships with Israel being resumed by Him hereafter, when the nation shall be re-established and in the enjoyment of the promises. Not that this epistle views them as actually on that ground; on the contrary it insists on what is heavenly, and walking by faith as Abraham and others who had not the promises, but it lays down principles which can apply to that position, and in one or two passages it leaves (and ought to leave) a place for this ultimate blessing of the nation. The epistle to the Romans, in the direct instruction which it furnishes, cannot leave this place for the blessings proper to the Jewish people. In its point of view all are alike sinners, and all in Christ are justified together before God in heaven. Still less in the epistle to the Ephesians, with the object which it has in view, could there be room for speaking of the future blessing of God’s people on the earth. It only contemplates Christians as united to their heavenly Head, as His body; or as the habitation of God on earth by the Holy Ghost. The epistle to the Romans, in the passage that shews the compatibility of this salvation (which, because it was of God, was for all without

distinction) with the faithfulness of God to His promises made to the nation, touches the chord of which we speak even more distinctly than the epistle to the Hebrews; and shews us that Israel will—although in a different way from before—resume their place in the line peculiar to the heirs of promise; a place which, through their sin, was partially left vacant for a time to allow the bringing in of the Gentiles on the principle of faith into this blessed succession. We find this in Romans n. But the object in both epistles is to separate the faithful entirely from earth, and to bring them into relationship religiously with heaven; the one (that to the Romans) as regards their personal presentation to God by means of forgiveness and divine righteousness; the other, with respect to the means that God has established, in order that the believer, in his walk here below, may find his present relationships with heaven maintained and his daily connection with God preserved in its integrity.

I have said preserved, because this is the subject of the epistle;73 but it must be added, that these relationships are established on this ground by divine revelations, which communicate the will of God and the conditions under which He is pleased to connect Himself with His people.

We should also remark, that in the epistle to the Hebrews, although the relationship of the people with God is established on a new ground, being founded on the heavenly position of the Mediator, they are considered as already existing. God treats with a people already known to Him. He addresses persons in relationship with Himself, and who for a long period have held the position of a people whom God had taken out from the world unto Himself. It is not, as in Romans,

sinners without law or transgressors of the law, between whom there is no difference, because all have alike come entirely short of the glory of God, all alike are the children of wrath, or, as in Ephesians, an entirely new creation unknown before. They were in need of some better thing; but those here addressed were in that need because they were in relationship with God, and the condition of their relationship with Him brought nothing to perfection. That which they possessed was in fact nothing but signs and figures; still, the people were, I again say, a people in relationship with God. Many of them might refuse the new method of blessing and grace, and consequently would be lost; but the link between the people and God is accounted to subsist: only that, Messiah having been revealed, a place among that people could not be had but in the recognition of Messiah.

It is very important for the understanding of this epistle to apprehend this point, namely, that it is addressed to Hebrews on the ground of a relationship which still existed,74 although it only retained its force in so far as they acknowledged the Messiah, who was its corner-stone. Hence the first words connect their present state with previous revelations, instead of In 1 John, where communion is spoken of, which is interrupted by sin, we have an advocate with the Father if any man sin—this also founded on perfect righteousness and propitiation in Him. The priesthood of Christ reconciles a perfect heavenly standing with God, with a weak condition on earth ever liable to failure—gives comfort and dependence in the path through the desert. breaking off all connection and introducing a new thing as yet

unrevealed. Some remarks on the form of the epistle will help us to understand it better.

It does not contain the name of its author. The reason of this is touching and remarkable. It is that the Lord Himself, according to this epistle, was the Apostle of Israel. The apostles whom He sent were only employed to confirm His words by transmitting them to others, God Himself confirming their testimony by miraculous gifts. This also makes us understand that, although as Priest the Lord is in heaven for the exercise of His priesthood there, and in order to establish on new ground the relationship of the people with God, yet the communications of God with His people by means of the Messiah had begun when Jesus was on earth living in their midst. Consequently the character of their relationship was not union with Him in heaven; it was relationship with God on the ground of divine communications and of the service of a Mediator with God.

Moreover this epistle is a discourse, a treatise, rather than a letter addressed in the exercise of apostolic functions to saints with whom the writer was personally in connection. The author takes the place of a teacher rather than of an apostle. He speaks doubtless from the height of the heavenly calling, but in connection with the actual position of the Jewish people; nevertheless, it was for the purpose of making believers at length understand that they must abandon that position.

The time for judgment on the nation was drawing near; and with regard to this the destruction of Jerusalem had great significance, because it definitely broke off all outward relationship between God and the Jewish

people. There was no longer an altar or sacrifice, priest or sanctuary. Every link was then broken by judgment, and remains broken until it shall be formed again under the new covenant according to grace.

Further, it will be found that there is more contrast than comparison. The veil is compared, but then, closing the entrance to the sanctuary, now, a new and living way into it; a sacrifice, but then repeated, so as to say sins were still there, now once for all so that there is no remembrance of sins; and so of every important particular.

The author of this epistle (Paul, I doubt not, but this is of little importance) employed other motives than that of the approaching judgment to induce the believing Jews to abandon their Judaic relationships. It is this last step however which he engages them to take; and the judgment was at hand. Until now they had linked Christianity with Judaism; there had been thousands of Christians who were very zealous for the law. But God was about to destroy that system altogether— already in fact judged by the Jews' rejection of Christ, and by their resistance to the testimony of the Holy Ghost. Our epistle engages believers to come forth entirely from that system and to bear the Lord's reproach, setting before them a new foundation for their relationship with God in a High Priest who is in the heavens. At the same time it links all that it says with the testimony of God by the prophets through the intermedium of Christ, the Son of God, speaking during His life on earth, though now speaking from heaven.

Thus the new position is plainly set forth, but continuity with the former is also established; and we have a

glimpse, by means of the new covenant, of continuity also with that which is to come—a thread by which another state of things, the millennial state, is connected with the whole of God's dealings with the nation, although that which is taught and developed in the epistle is the position of believers (of the people), formed by the revelation of a heavenly Christ on whom depended all their connection with God. They were to come forth from the camp; but it was because Jesus, in order to sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. For here there is no continuing city: we seek one that is to come. The writer places himself among the remnant of the people as one of them. He teaches with the full light of the Holy Ghost, but not those to whom he had been sent as an apostle, with the apostolic authority which such a mission would have given him over them. It will be understood that in saying this we speak of the relationship of the writer, not of the inspiration of the writing.

While developing the sympathies of Christ and His sufferings, in order to shew that He is able to compassionate the suffering and the tried, the epistle does not bring forward His humiliation nor the reproach of the cross, till quite at the end when—His glory having been set forth—the author engages the Jew to follow Him and to share His reproach.

The glory of the Messiah's Person, His sympathies, His heavenly glory, are made prominent in order to strengthen the faltering faith of the Jewish Christians, and to fortify them in their christian position, that they might view the latter in its true character; and that they themselves, being connected with heaven and established in their heavenly calling, might learn to bear

the cross and to separate themselves from the religion of the flesh, and not draw back to a Judaism just ready to pass away.

We must look then in this epistle for the character of relationships with God, formed upon the revelation of the Messiah in the position which He had taken on high, and not for the doctrine of a new nature; approach to God in the holiest, impossible in Judaism, but no revelation of the Father, nor union with Christ on high.

He is speaking to persons who were familiar with the privileges of the fathers. God had spoken to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways; and now, at the end of those days, that is to say, at the end of the days of the Israelite dispensation, in which the law ought to have been in vigour; at the end of the times during which God maintained relationship with Israel (sustaining them with a disobedient people by means of the prophets)—at the end then of those days God had spoken in the Person of the Son. There is no breach to begin a wholly new system. The God who had spoken before by the prophets now went on to speak in Christ.

It was not only by inspiring holy men (as He had done before), that they might recall Israel to the law and announce the coming of the Messiah. Himself had spoken as the Son— in [His] Son. We see at once that the writer connects the revelation made by Jesus75 of the thoughts of God, with the former words addressed to Israel by the prophets. God has spoken, he says, identifying himself with His people, to us, as He spake to our fathers by the prophets.

The Messiah had spoken, the Son of whom the scriptures had already testified. This gives occasion to lay open, according to the scriptures, the glory of this Messiah, of Jesus, with regard to His Person, and to the position He has taken.

And here we must always remember, that it is the Messiah of whom he is speaking—He who once spoke on the earth. He declares indeed His divine glory; but it is the glory of Him who has spoken which he declares, the glory of that Son who had appeared according to the promises made to Israel.

This glory is twofold, and in connection with the twofold office of Christ. It is the divine glory of the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God. The solemn authority of His word is connected with this glory. And then there is the glory with which His humanity is invested according to the counsels of God—the glory of the Son of man; a glory connected with His sufferings during His sojourn here below, which fitted Him for the exercise of a priesthood both merciful and intelligent with regard to the necessities and the trials of His people.

These two chapters are the foundation of all the doctrine of the epistle. In chapter 1 we find the divine glory of the Messiah's Person; in chapter 2:1-4 (which continues the subject), the authority of His word; and from 5-18 His glorious humanity. As Man, all things are put in subjection under Him; nevertheless, before being glorified, He took part in all the sufferings and in all the temptations to which the saints, whose nature He had assumed, are subjected. With this glory His priesthood is connected: He is able to succour them that are tempted,

in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted. Thus He is the Apostle and the High Priest of the “called” people.

To this twofold glory is joined an accessory glory: He is Head, as Son, over God’s house, possessing this authority as the One who created all things, even as Moses had authority as a servant in the house of God on earth. Now the believers, whom the inspired writer was addressing, were this house, if at least they held fast their confession of His name unto the end. For the danger of the Hebrew converts was that of losing their confidence, because there was nothing before their eyes as the fulfilment of the promises. Consequently exhortations follow (chap. 3:7 to 4:13) which refer to the voice of the Lord, as carrying the word of God into the midst of the people, in order that they might not harden their hearts. {Heb 4:14}

From chapter 4:14 the subject of the priesthood is treated, leading to the value of the sacrifice of Christ, but introducing also the two covenants in passing, and insisting on the change of the law necessarily consequent upon the change of priesthood. Then comes the value of the sacrifice very fully in contrast with the figures that accompanied the old; and on which, and on the blood which was shed in them, the covenant itself was founded. This instruction on the priesthood continues to the end of verse 18 in chapter 10. The exhortations founded thereon introduce the principle of the endurance of faith, which leads to chapter n, in which the cloud of witnesses is reviewed, crowning them with the example of Christ Himself, who completed the whole career of faith in spite of every obstacle, and who shews us where this painful but glorious path terminates (chap. 12:2). {Heb 12:3}

From chapter 12:3 he enters more closely into the trials found in the path of faith, and gives the most solemn warning with regard to the danger of those who draw back, and the most precious encouragements to those who persevere in it, setting forth the relationship into which we are brought by grace: and finally in chapter 13 he exhorts the faithful Hebrews on several points of detail, and in particular on that of unreservedly taking the christian position under the cross, laying stress on the fact that Christians alone had the true worship of God, and that they who chose to persevere in Judaism had no right to take part in it. In a word, he would have them to separate themselves definitely from a Judaism which was already judged, and to lay hold of the heavenly calling, bearing the cross here below. It was now a heavenly calling, and the path a path of faith.

Such is the summary of our epistle. We return now to the study of its chapters in detail. {Heb 1}

Chapter 1. We have said that in chapter 1 we find the glory of the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God, by whom God has spoken to the people. When I say “to the people,” it is evident that we understand the epistle to be addressed to the believing remnant, partakers, it is said, of the heavenly calling, but considered as alone holding the true place of the people.

It is a distinction given to the remnant, in view of the position which the Messiah took in connection with His people, to whom in the first instance He came. The tried and despised remnant, viewed as alone really having their place, are encouraged, and their faith is sustained by the true glory of their Messiah, hidden from their natural eyes, and the object of faith only.

“God” (says the inspired writer, placing himself among the believers of the beloved nation), “has spoken to us in the person of his Son.” Psalm 2 should have led the Jews to expect the Son, and they ought to have formed a high idea of His glory from Isaiah 9, and other scriptures, which in fact were applied to the Messiah by their teachers, as the rabbinical writings still prove. But that He should be in heaven, and not have raised His people to the possession of earthly glory— this did not suit the carnal state of their hearts.

Now it is heavenly glory, this true position of the Messiah and His people, in connection with His divine right to their attention and to the worship of the angels themselves, which is so admirably presented here, where the Spirit of God brings out, in so infinitely precious a manner, the divine glory of Christ, for the purpose of exhorting His people to belief in a heavenly position; at the same time setting forth in what follows His perfect sympathy with us, as Man, in order to maintain their communion with heaven in spite of the difficulties of their path on earth.

Thus, although the assembly is not found in the epistle to the Hebrews, save in an allusion to all comprised in the millennial glory in chapter 12, the Saviour of the assembly is there presented in His Person, His work, and His priesthood, most richly to our hearts and to our spiritual intelligence; and the heavenly calling is in itself very particularly developed.

It is also most interesting to see the way in which the work of our Saviour, accomplished for us, forms a part of the manifestation of His divine glory.

“God has spoken in the Son,” says the inspired author of our epistle. He is then this Son. First He is declared Heir of all things. It is He who is to possess gloriously as Son everything that exists. Such are the decrees of God. Moreover it is by Him that God created the worlds.76 All the vast system of this universe, those unknown worlds that trace their paths in the vast regions of space in divine order to manifest the glory of a Creator-God, are the work of His hand who has spoken to us, of the divine Christ.

In Him has shone forth the glory of God: He is the perfect impress of His being. We see God in Him, in all that He said, in all that He did, in His Person. Moreover by the power of His word He upholds all that exists. He is then the Creator. God is revealed in His Person. He sustains all things by His word, which has thus a divine power. But this is not all (for we are still speaking of the Christ); there is another part of His glory, divine indeed, yet manifested in human nature. He who was all this which we have just seen, when He had by Himself (accomplishing His own glory,77 and for His glory) wrought the purification of our sins, seated Himself at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Here is in full the personal glory of Christ. He is in fact the Creator, the revelation of God, the upholder of all things by His word, He is the Redeemer. He has by Himself purged our sins; has seated Himself at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It is the Messiah who is all this. He is the Creator-God, but He is a Messiah who has taken His place in the heavens at the right hand of Majesty, having accomplished the purification of our sins. We perceive how this exhibition of the glory of Christ, the Messiah, whether personal or that of position, would bring

whoever believed in it out of Judaism, while linking itself with the Jewish promises and hopes. He is God, He has come down from heaven, He has gone up thither again.

Now those who attached themselves to Him found themselves, in another respect also, above the Jewish system. That system was ordained in connection with angels; but Christ has taken a position much higher than that of angels, because He has for His own proper inheritance a name (that is, a revelation of what He is) which is much more excellent than that of angels. Upon this the author of this epistle quotes several passages from the Old Testament which speak of the Messiah, in order to shew that which He is in contrast with the nature and the relative position of angels. The significance of these passages to a converted Jew is evident, and we readily perceive the adaptation of the argument to such, for the Jewish economy was under the administration of angels, according to their own belief—a belief fully grounded on the word.78 And, at the same time, it was their own scriptures which proved that the Messiah was to have a position much more excellent and exalted than that of angels, according to the rights that belonged to Him by virtue of His nature, and according to the counsels and the revelation of God: so that they who united themselves to Him were brought into connection with that which entirely eclipsed the law and all that related to it, and to the Jewish economy which could not be separated from it, and whose glory was angelic in character. The glory of Christianity—and he speaks to those who acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ—was so much above the glory of the law, that the two could not be really united.

The quotations begin by that from Psalm 2. God, it is written, has never said to any of the angels, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” It is this character of Sonship, proper to the Messiah, which, as a real relationship, distinguishes Him. He was from eternity the Son of the Father; but it is not precisely in this point of view that He is here considered. The name expresses the same relationship, but it is to the Messiah born on earth that this title is here applied. For Psalm 2, as establishing Him as King in Zion, announces the decree which proclaims His title. “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,” is His relationship in time, with God. It depends, I doubt not, on His glorious nature; but this position for man was acquired by the miraculous birth of Jesus here below, and demonstrated as true and determined in its true import by His resurrection. In Psalm 2 the testimony borne to this relationship is in connection with His kingship in Zion, but it declares the personal glories of the King acknowledged of God. By virtue of the rights connected with this title, all kings are summoned to submit themselves to Him. This Psalm then is speaking of the government of the world, when God establishes the Messiah as King in Zion, and not of the gospel. But in the passage quoted (Heb. 1:5), it is the relationship of glory in which He subsists with God, the foundation of His rights, which is set forth, and not the royal rights themselves.

This is likewise the case in the next quotation: “I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.” Here we plainly see that it is the relationship in which He is with God,in which God accepts and owns Him, and not His eternal relationship with the Father: “I will be to him a

Father," etc. Thus it is still the Messiah, the King in Zion, the Son of David; for these words are applied in the first place to Solomon, as the son of David (2 Sam. 7:14 and 1 Chron. 17:13). In this second passage the application of the expression to the true Son of David is more distinct. A relationship so intimate (expressed, one may say, with so much affection) was not the portion of angels. The Son of God, acknowledged to be so by God Himself—this is the portion of the Messiah in connection with God. The Messiah then is the Son of God in an altogether peculiar way, which could not be applied to angels.

But still more: —when God introduces the Firstborn into the world, all the angels are called to worship Him. God presents Him to the world; but the highest of created beings must then cast themselves at His feet. The angels of God Himself —the creatures that are nearest to Him— must do homage to the Firstborn. This last expression also is remarkable. The Firstborn is the Heir, the beginning of the manifestation of the glory and power of God. It is in this sense that the word is used. It is said of the Son of David, "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (Psa. 89:27). Thus the Messiah is introduced into the world as holding this place with regard to God Himself. He is the Firstborn— the immediate expression of the rights and the glory of God. He has universal pre-eminence.

Such is, so to speak, the positional glory of the Messiah. Not only Head of the people on earth, as Son of David, nor even only the acknowledged Son of God on the earth, according to Psalm 2, but the universal Firstborn; so that the chief and most exalted of creatures, those nearest to God, the angels of God, the instruments of

His power and government, must do homage to the Son in this His position.

Yet this is far from being all; and this homage itself would be out of place if His glory were not proper to Himself and personal, if it were not connected with His nature. Nevertheless that which we have before us in this chapter is still the Messiah as owned of God. God tells us what He is. Of the angels He says, “He maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.” He does not make His Son anything: He recognises that which He is, saying, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” The Messiah may have an earthly throne (which also is not taken from Him, but which ceases by His taking possession of an eternal throne), but He has a throne which is for ever and ever.

The sceptre of His throne, as Messiah, is a sceptre of righteousness. Also He has, when here below, personally loved righteousness and hated iniquity: therefore God has anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows. These companions are the believing remnant of Israel, whom He has made by grace His fellows, although (perfectly well-pleasing to God by His love of righteousness—and that, at all costs) He is exalted above them all. This is a remarkable passage, because, while on the one hand the divinity of the Lord is fully established as well as His eternal throne, on the other hand the passage comes down to His character as the faithful man on earth, where He made pious men—the little remnant of Israel who waited for redemption, His companions; at the same time it gives Him (and it could not be otherwise) a place above them. The text then returns to the glory given Him as Man, having the pre-eminence here as in all things.

I have already remarked elsewhere that while, as we read in Zechariah, Jehovah recognises as His fellow the humbled Man, against whom His sword awakes to smite; here, where the divinity of Jesus is set forth, the same Jehovah owns the poor remnant of believers as the fellows of the divine Saviour. Marvellous links between God and His people!

Already then in these remarkable testimonies He has the eternal throne and the sceptre of righteousness: He is recognised as God although a Man, and glorified above all others as the reward of righteousness. But the declaration of His divinity, the divinity of the Messiah, must be more precise. And the testimony is of the greatest beauty. The Psalm that contains it is one of the most complete expressions we find in scripture of the sense which Jesus had of His humiliation on earth, of His dependence on Jehovah, and that, having been raised up as Messiah from among men, He was cast down and His days shortened. If Zion were re-built (and the Psalm speaks prophetically of the time when it shall take place), where would He be, Messiah as He was, if, weakened and humbled, He was cut off in the midst of His days (as was the case)? In a word, it is the prophetic expression of the Saviour's heart in the prospect of that which happened to Him as a Man on the earth, the utterance of His heart to Jehovah, in those days of humiliation, in presence of the renewed affection of the remnant for the dust of Zion—an affection which the Lord had produced in their hearts, and which was therefore a token of His good-will and His purpose to re-establish it. But how could a Saviour who was cut off have part in it? (a searching question for a believing Jew, tempted on that side). The words here quoted are the

answer to this question. Humbled as He might be, He was the Creator Himself. He was ever the same;79 His years could never fail. It was He who had founded the heavens: He would fold them up as a garment, but He Himself would never change.

Such then is the testimony rendered to the Messiah by the scriptures of the Jews themselves—the glory of His position above the angels who administered His dispensation of the law; His eternal throne of righteousness; His unchangeable divinity as Creator of all things.

One thing remained to complete this chain of glory—that is, the place occupied at present by Christ, in contrast still with the angels (a place that depends, on the one hand, upon the divine glory of His Person; on the other, upon the accomplishment of His work). And this place is at the right hand of God, who called Him to sit there until He had made His enemies His footstool. Not only in His Person glorious and divine, not only does He hold the first place with regard to all creatures in the universe (we have spoken of this, which will take place when He is introduced into the world), but He has His own place at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. To which of the angels has God ever said this? They are servants on God’s part to the heirs of salvation. {Heb 2}

Chapter 2. This is the reason why it is so much the more needful to hearken to the word spoken, in order that they should not let it pass away from life and memory.

God had maintained the authority of the word that was communicated by means of angels, punishing disobedience to it, for it was a law. How then shall we

escape if we neglect a salvation which the Lord Himself has announced? Thus the service of the Lord among the Jews was a word of salvation, which the apostles confirmed, and which the mighty testimony of the Holy Ghost established.

Such is the exhortation addressed to the believing Jews, founded on the glory of the Messiah, whether with regard to His position or His Person, calling them away from what was Jewish to higher thoughts of Christ.

We have already remarked that the testimony of which this epistle treats, is attributed to the Lord Himself. Therefore we must not expect to find it in the assembly (as such), of which the Lord had only spoken prophetically; but His testimony in relation to Israel, among whom He sojourned on the earth, to whatever extent that testimony reached. That which was spoken by the apostles is only treated here as a confirmation of the Lord's own word, God having added His testimony to it by the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, who distributed His gifts to each according to His will.

The glory of which we have been speaking is the personal glory of the Messiah, the Son of David; and His glory in the time present, during which God has called Him to sit at His right hand. He is the Son of God, He is even the Creator; but there is also His glory in connection with the world to come, as Son of man. Of this chapter 2 speaks, comparing Him still with the angels; but here to exclude them altogether. In the previous chapter they had their place: the law was given by angels; they are servants, on God's part, of the heirs of salvation. In chapter 2 they have no place, they do not reign; the world to come is not made subject to them—

that is, this habitable earth, directed and governed as it will be when God shall have accomplished that which He has spoken of by the prophets.

The order of the world, placed in relationship with Jehovah under the law, or “lying in darkness,” has been interrupted by the rejection of the Messiah, who has taken His place at the right hand of God on high, His enemies being not yet given into His hand for judgment; because God is carrying on His work of grace, and gathering out the assembly. But He will yet establish a new order of things on the earth; this will be “the world to come.” Now that world is not made subject to angels. The testimony given in the Old Testament with regard to this is as follows: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels; thou hast crowned him with glory and honour; thou hast set him over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.” Thus all things without exception (save He who has made them subject to Him), are, according to the purpose of God, put under the feet of man, and in particular of the Son of man.

When studying the Book of Psalms, we saw that which I recall here, namely, that this testimony in Psalm 8 is, with regard to the position and dominion of Christ as man, an advance upon Psalm 2. Psalm 1 sets before us the righteous man, accepted of God, the godly remnant with which Christ connected Himself; Psalm 2, the counsels of God respecting His Messiah, in spite of the efforts made by the kings and governors of the earth. God establishes Him as King in Zion, and summons all the kings to do homage to Him whom He proclaimed to be His Son on the earth. Afterwards we see that being

rejected the remnant suffer, and this Psalm 2 is what Peter quotes to prove the rising up of the powers of the earth, Jewish and Gentile, against Messiah (Acts 4:26). But Psalm 8 shews that all this only served to enlarge the sphere of His glory. Christ takes the position of man and the title of Son of man, and enjoys His rights according to the counsels of God; and, made lower than the angels, He is crowned with glory and honour. And not only are the kings of the earth made subject to Him, but all things, without exception, are put under His feet. 80 It is this which the apostle quotes here. The Christ had already been rejected, and His being established as King in Zion put off to be accomplished at a later period. He had been exalted to the right hand of God, as we have seen; and the wider title had accrued to Him, although the result was not yet accomplished.

To this the epistle here calls our attention. We see not yet the accomplishment of all that this Psalm announces, namely, that all things should be put under His feet; but a part is already fulfilled, a guarantee to the heart of the fulfilment of the whole. Made a little lower than the angels in order to suffer death, He is crowned with glory and honour. He has suffered death, and He is crowned in reward for His work, by which He perfectly glorified God in the place where He had been dishonoured, and saved man (those who believe in Him) where man was lost. For He was made lower than the angels, in order that, by the grace of God, He should taste death for all things. It appears to me that the words “for the suffering of death,” and “a little lower than the angels “go together; and “so that by the grace of God” is a general phrase connected with the whole truth stated.

This passage then, which is thus applied to the Lord, presents Him as exalted to heaven when He had undergone the death which gave Him a right to all in a new way while waiting till all is put under His feet. But there is another truth connected with this. He had undertaken the cause of the sons whom God is bringing to glory, and therefore He must enter into the circumstances in which they were found, suffer the consequences thereof, and be treated according to the work He had undertaken. It was a reality; and it was fitting that God should vindicate the rights of His glory, and should maintain it with reference to those who had dishonoured Him, and that He should treat the One who had taken their cause in hand, and who stood before Him in their name, as representing them in that respect. God would bring the captain of their salvation to perfection through sufferings. He was to undergo the consequences of the situation into which He had come. His work was to be a reality, according to the measure of the responsibility which He had taken upon Himself, and it involved the glory of God where sin was. He must therefore suffer; He must taste death. It is by the grace of God that He did so—we, because of sin; He, because of grace for sin.

This shews us the Christ standing in the midst of those who are saved, whom God brings to glory, although at their head. It is this which our epistle sets before us—He who sanctifies (the Christ), and they who are sanctified (the remnant set apart for God by the Spirit) are all of one: an expression, the force of which is easily apprehended, but difficult to express, when one abandons the abstract nature of the phrase itself. Observe that it is only of sanctified persons that this is

said. Christ and the sanctified ones are all one company, men together in the same position before God. But the idea goes a little farther. It is not of one and the same Father; had it been so, it could not have been said, “He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” He could not then do otherwise than call them brethren.

If we say “of the same mass” the expression may be pushed too far, as though He and the others were of the same nature as children of Adam, sinners together. In this case He would have to call every man His brother; whereas it is only the children whom God has given Him, “sanctified” ones, that He so calls. But He and the sanctified ones are all as men in the same nature and position together before God. When I say “the same,” it is not in the same state of sin, but the contrary, for they are the Sanctifier and the sanctified, but in the same truth of human position as it is before God as sanctified to Him; the same as far forth as man when He, as the sanctified one, is before God. On this account He is not ashamed to call the sanctified His brethren.

This position is entirely gained by resurrection; for although, in principle, the children were given to Him before, yet He only called them His brethren when He had finished the work which enabled Him to present them with Himself before God. He said indeed “mother, sister, brother”; but He did not use the term “my brethren” [as in John 20] until He said to Mary of Magdala, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” Also in Psalm 22 it is when He had been heard from the horns of the unicorn, that He declared the name of a Deliverer-God to His brethren, and that He praised God in the midst of the assembly.

He spoke to them of the Father's name while on earth, but the link itself could not be formed; He could not introduce them to the Father, until the grain of wheat, falling into the ground, had died; until then He remained alone, whatever might be the revelations that He made to them; and in fact, He declared the name of His Father to those whom He had given Him. Still He had actually taken the human position, and He Himself was in this relationship with God. He kept them in the Father's name, they were not yet united to Him in this position; but He was as man in the relationship with God in which they also should be, when brought in by redemption into association with Himself. That which He does in the latter part of the Gospel by John is to place His disciples —in the explanations He gave of the condition in which He left them— in the position which He in fact had held in relationship with His Father on earth, and in testimony to the world, the glory of His Person as representing and revealing His Father being necessarily distinct. And, in seeking to associate with them, He associated them with Himself and Himself with them when He ascended to heaven, although no longer corporeally subject to the trials of their position.81 He was not ashamed then to call them brethren, saying, though risen, yea, only when risen, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, I will praise thee in the midst of the assembly." And speaking of the remnant separated from Israel, He says, "Behold I and the children whom God hath given me are for signs unto the two houses of Israel"; and again, "I will put my trust in him"—another quotation from Isaiah 8. So in the Psalms, especially in Psalm 16, He declares that He does not take His place as God—"my goodness extendeth not to thee," but that He identifies Himself with the excellent of the earth—

that all His delight is in them. This is again the remnant of Israel called by grace.

Christ associates these sanctified men, godly men on earth, with Himself. In the passage quoted it is still His place on earth; His sufferings, His exaltation, future glory, divinity are, as we have seen, added here.

Having taken this place as of, but at the head of, the chosen band—their servant in all things, He must conform Himself to their position. And this He did: the children being partakers of flesh and blood, He took part in the same; and this, in order that by death He might put an end to the dominion of him who had the power of death, and deliver those who, through fear of death, had been subjected all their life to the yoke of bondage.

Here also (the apostle seeking always to display the glorious and efficacious side, even of that which was most humbling, in order to accustom the weak heart of the Jews to that portion of the Gospel) we find that the Lord's work goes far beyond the limits of a presentation of the Messiah to His people. Not only is He glorious in heaven, but He has conquered Satan in the very place where he exercised his sad dominion over man, and where the judgment of God lay heavily upon man.

Moved by a profound love for man, the Son—become the Son of man—enters in heart and in fact into all the need, and submits to all the circumstances, of man in order to deliver him. He takes (for He was not in it before) flesh and blood, in order to die, because man was subjected to death; and (in order to destroy him who exercised his dominion over man through death, and made him tremble all his lifetime in the expectation of that terrible moment, which testified of the judgment of God, and the

inability of man to escape the consequences of sin) the condition into which disobedience to God had plunged him. For verily the Lord did not undertake the cause of angels, but that of the seed of Abraham, and in order to proclaim the work that was necessary for them, and to represent them efficaciously and really before God, He must needs put Himself into the position and the circumstances in which that seed were found, though not the state they were personally in.

It will be remarked here, that it is still a family owned of God, which is before our eyes, as the object of the Saviour's affection and care—the children whom God had given Him, children of Abraham after the flesh, if in that condition they answered to the designation of "seed of Abraham" (this is the question of John 8:37-39), or his children according to the Spirit, if grace gives it them.

These truths introduce priesthood. As Son of man, He had been made a little less than the angels, and, crowned already with glory and honour, was hereafter to have all things put under His feet. This we do not yet see. But He took this place of humiliation in order to taste death for the whole system that was afar from God, and to gain the full rights of the second Man, by glorifying God there, where the creature had failed through weakness, and where also the enemy, having deceived man by his subtlety, had dominion over him (according to the righteous judgment of God) in power and malice. At the same time he tasted death for the special purpose of delivering the children whom God would bring to glory, taking their nature and gathering them together as sanctified ones around Himself, He not being ashamed to call them brethren. But it was thus that He was to present them now before God, according

to the efficacy of the work which He had accomplished for them; He would become a priest, being able through His life of humiliation and trial here below, to sympathise with His own in all their conflicts and difficulties.

He suffered—never yielded. We do not suffer when we yield to temptation: the flesh takes pleasure in the things by which it is tempted. Jesus suffered, being tempted, and He is able to succour them that are tempted. It is important to observe that the flesh, when acted upon by its desires, does not suffer. Being tempted, it, alas! enjoys. But when, according to the light of the Holy Ghost and the fidelity of obedience, the Spirit resists the attacks of the enemy, whether subtle or persecuting, then one surfers. This the Lord did, and this we have to do. That which needs succour is the new man, the faithful heart, and not the flesh. I need succour against the flesh, and in order to mortify all the members of the old man.

Here the needed help refers to the difficulties of the faithful saint in fulfilling all the will of God. This is where he suffers, this is where the Lord—who has suffered—can succour him. He trod this path, He learnt in it that which can be suffered there from the enemy, and from men. A human heart feels it, and Jesus had a human heart. Besides, the more faithful the heart is, the more full of love to God, and the less it has of that hardness which is the result of intercourse with the world, the more will it suffer. Now there was no hardness in Jesus. His faithfulness and His love were equally perfect. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief and weariness. He suffered being tempted.82 {Heb 3}

Chapter 3. Thus the Lord is set before us as the Apostle and High Priest of believers from among the Jews, the true people. I say, “from among the Jews,” not that He is not our Priest, but that here the sacred writer places himself among the believing Jews, saying “our”; and, instead of speaking of himself as an apostle, he points out Jesus as the Apostle; which He was in Person among the Jews. In principle, it is true of all believers. That which He has said is the Lord’s word, and He is able to succour us when we are tempted. We are His house.

For we have here a third character of Christ. He is a “Son over his house.” Moses was faithful in all the house of God as a servant, in testimony to the things that were afterwards to be proclaimed. But Christ is over God’s house; but it is not as a servant but as a Son. He has built the house. He is God.

Moses identified himself with the house, faithful therein in all things. But Christ is more excellent; even as he who builds the house is more excellent than the house. But He who builds all things is God. And this is what Christ did. For in fact the house (that is, the tabernacle in the wilderness) was a figure of the universe; and Christ passed through the heavens, as the high priest passed into the sanctuary. All was cleansed with blood, even as God will reconcile all things by Christ in the heavens and on the earth. In a certain sense this universe is the house of God. He deigns to inhabit it. Christ created it all. But there is a house which is more properly His own. We are His house, taking it for granted that we persevere to the end.

The Hebrew Christians were in danger—being attracted by their former habits, and by a law and ceremonies

which God Himself had established—of forsaking a Christianity, in which Christ was not visible, for things that were visible and palpable. The Christ of Christians, far from being a crown of glory to the people, was only an object of faith, so that, if faith failed, He was deprived of all importance to them. A religion that made itself seen (the “old wine”) naturally attracted those that had been accustomed to it.

But in fact Christ was much more excellent than Moses; as he who has built the house had more honour than the house. Now this house was the figure of all things, and He who had built them was God. The passage gives us this view of Christ and of the house, and also says, that we are this house. And Christ is not the servant here; He is the Son over God’s house.

We must always remember that which has been already remarked, namely, that in this epistle we have not the assembly as the body of Christ in union with Himself; nor even the Father either, except as a comparison in chapter 12. It is God, a heavenly Christ (who is the Son of God), and a people, the Messiah being a heavenly Mediator between the people and God. Therefore the proper privileges of the assembly are not found in this epistle—they flow from our union with Christ; and here Christ is a Person apart, who is between us and God, on high while we are here.

There are still a few remarks which we may add here in order to throw light on this point, and to assist the reader in understanding the first two chapters, as well as the principle of the instructions throughout the epistle. {Heb 1}

In chapter 1 Christ accomplishes by Himself as a part of His divine glory the purification of sins, and seats Himself at the right hand of God. This work, observe, is done by Himself. We have nothing to do with it, save to believe in and enjoy it. It is a divine work which this divine Person has accomplished by Himself; so that it has all the absolute perfection, all the force, of a work done by Him, without any mixture of our weakness, of our efforts, or of our experiences. He performed it by Himself, and it is accomplished. Thereupon He takes His seat. He is not placed there—He seats Himself upon the throne on high. {Heb 2}

In chapter 2 we see another point which characterises the epistle—the present state of the glorified Man. He is crowned with glory and honour; but it is with a view to an order of things which is not yet accomplished. It is the Person of the Man Christ which is presented, not the assembly in union with Him, even when He is beheld as glorified in the heavens. This glory is viewed as a partial accomplishment of that which belongs to Him, according to the counsels of God, as the Son of man. Hereafter this glory will be complete in all its parts by the subjugation of all things.

The present glory therefore of Christ makes us look forward to an order of things yet future, which will be full rest, full blessing. In a word, besides the perfection of His work, the epistle sets before us the sequel of that which belongs to the Christ in Person, the Son of man, not the perfection of the assembly in Him. And this embraces the present time, the character of which, to the believer, depends on Christ’s being now glorified in heaven while waiting for a future state, in which all things will be subjected to Him.

In this chapter 2 we see also that He is crowned. He is not seen sitting there as in His own original right, though He had that glory before the world was, but, having been made a little less than the angels, God crowns Him. We also plainly see that although the believing Hebrews are especially in view, and even all Christians are classed under the title of Abraham's seed on the earth, yet that Christ is viewed nevertheless as the Son of man, and not as the Son of David; and the question is put, "What is man? "The answer (the precious answer for us) is, Christ glorified, once dead on account of man's condition. In Him we see the mind of God with regard to man.

The fact that Christians themselves are viewed as the seed of Abraham plainly shews the way in which they are considered as forming part of the chain of the heirs of promise on earth (as in Rom. 11), and not as the assembly united to Christ as His body in heaven.

The work is perfect; it is the work of God. He has by Himself made purification of sins. The full result of the counsels of God with regard to the Son of man is not yet come. Thus the earthly part can be brought in, as a thing foreseen, as well as the heavenly part, although the persons to whom the epistle is addressed had part in the heavenly glory—participated in the heavenly calling —in connection with the present position of the Son of man.

The remnant of the Jews, as we have said, are considered as continuing the chain of the people blessed on earth, whatever heavenly privileges they may also possess or whatever their especial state may be in connection with the Messiah's exaltation to heaven. We

have been grafted into the good olive-tree, so that we share all the advantages here spoken of. Our highest position, and the privileges belonging to it, are not here in view. Accordingly, as writing to Hebrews and as one among them, he addresses them, that is to say, Christians and believing Israelites. This is the force of the word “us “in the epistle; we must bear it in mind, and that the Hebrew believers always form the word “us,” of which the writer is also a part.

As I have said, we rightly appropriate it to ourselves in principle; but to have a clear view of his meaning, we must put ourselves at the point of view which the Spirit of God has taken.

No one ought to harden his heart; but this word is especially addressed to Israel, and that until the day when Christ shall appear. In speaking of it, the author returns to the word that had formerly been addressed to Israel; not now in order to warn them of the danger they would incur by neglecting it, but of the consequences of departing from that which they had acknowledged to be true. Israel, when delivered out of Egypt, had provoked God in the wilderness (it was indeed the case also of Christians in this world), because they were not at once, and without difficulty, in Canaan. Those to whom he wrote were in danger of forsaking the living God in the same way; that is, the danger was there before their eyes. They should rather exhort each other, while it was still called to-day, in order that they might not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This word “to-day” is the expression of the patient activity of God’s grace towards Israel even unto the end. The people were unbelieving; they have hardened their hearts; they have done so, and will alas! do so to the end, until judgment

come in the Person of the Messiah-Jehovah, whom they have despised. But until then God loves to reiterate, “To-day, if ye will hear my voice.” It may be that only a few will hearken; it may be that the nation is judicially hardened, in order to admit the Gentiles; but the word “to-day “still resounds for every one among them who has ears to hear, until the Lord shall appear in judgment. It is addressed to the people according to the long-suffering of God. For the remnant who had believed it was an especial warning not to walk in the ways of the hardened people who had refused to hearken—not to turn back to them, forsaking their own confidence in the word which had called them, as Israel did in the wilderness.

As long as the “to-day “of the call of grace should continue, they were to exhort one another, lest unbelief should glide into their hearts through the subtlety of sin. It is thus that the living God is forsaken. We speak thus practically, not with reference to the faithfulness of God, who certainly will not allow any of His own to perish, but with regard to practical danger, and to that which would draw us away—as to our responsibility—from God, and for ever, if God did not intervene, acting in the life which He has given us, and which never perishes.

Sin separates us from God in our thoughts; we have no longer the same sense either of His love, His power, or His interest in us. Confidence is lost. Hope, and the value of unseen things, diminish; while the value of things that are seen proportionately increases. The conscience is bad; one is not at ease with God. The path is hard and difficult; the will strengthens itself against Him. We no longer live by faith; visible things come in between us and God, and take possession of the heart.

Where there is life, God warns by His Spirit (as in this epistle). He chastises and restores. Where it was only an outward influence, a faith devoid of life, and the conscience not reached, it is abandoned.

It is the warning against so doing that arrests the living. The dead—they whose consciences are not engaged, who do not say, “To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life”—despise the warning and perish. This was the case with Israel in the wilderness, and God sware unto them that they should not enter into His rest (Num. 14:21-23). And why? They had given up their confidence in Him. Their unbelief— when the beauty and excellence of the land had been reported to them—deprived them of the promised rest.

The position of the believers to whom this epistle is addressed was the same as this, although in connection with better promises. The beauty and excellence of the heavenly Canaan had been proclaimed to them. They had, by the Spirit, seen and tasted its fruits; they were in the wilderness; they had to persevere to maintain their confidence unto the end.

Observe here—for Satan, and our own conscience when it has not been set free, often make use of this epistle—that doubting Christians are not here contemplated, or persons who have not yet gained entire confidence in God: to those who are in this condition its exhortations and warning have no application. These exhortations are to preserve the Christian in a confidence which he has, and to persevere, not to tranquillise fears and doubts. This use of the epistle to sanction such doubts is but a device of the enemy. Only I would add here that, although the full knowledge of grace (which in such a

case the soul has assuredly not yet attained) is the only thing that can deliver and set it free from its fears, yet it is very important in this case practically to maintain a good conscience, in order not to furnish the enemy with a special means of attack. {Heb 4}

Chapter 4. The apostle goes on to apply this part of Israel's history to those whom he was addressing, laying stress on two points: 1st, That Israel had failed of entering into rest through unbelief; 2nd, That the rest was yet to come, and that believers (those who were not seeking rest here, but who accepted the wilderness for the time being) should enter into it.

He begins by saying, "Let us fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any should seem to come short of it," not attain to it. For we have been the objects of the proclamation of glad tidings, as they were in times past. But the word addressed to them remained fruitless, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it: for we which have believed do enter into rest. The rest itself is yet to come, and it is believers who enter into it. For a rest of God there is, and there are some who enter into it: inasmuch as it is written, "They" that is, those (pointing out a certain class who are to be excluded) "shall not enter into my rest."

God had wrought in creation, and then rested from His works when He had finished them. Thus, from the foundation of the world, He has shewn that He had a rest, as in the passage already quoted, "If they shall enter into my rest"; but this, shewing that the entering in was yet in question, shewed that into God's rest in the first creation man had not entered. Two things then are evident—some were to enter in, and the Israel to whom

it was first proposed did not enter in because of their unbelief. Therefore He again fixes a day, saying, in David, long after the entrance into Canaan, “To-day—as it is written— to-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

Here a natural objection occurs to which the passage gives a complete answer, without speaking of the objection itself. The Israelites had indeed fallen in the wilderness, but Joshua had brought the people into Canaan which the unbelievers never reached; the Jews were there, so that they did enter into the rest as to which the others failed. The answer is evident. It was long after this that God said by David, “I sware in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest.” If Joshua had given rest to Israel, David could not afterwards have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. It is yet to come; but it is assured by the word of God— a truth, the bearing of which is immediately seen with regard to the connection of the believing Jews with the nation, in the midst of which they were tempted to seek a rest that, for the moment, faith did not afford them, and being enfeebled saw but dimly before it. To have God’s rest one must persevere in faith. Present apparent rest was not the true rest. God’s rest was still to be waited for. Faith alone acknowledged this, and sought for none in the wilderness, trusting to the promise. God still said “To-day.” The state of the people was worse than the rest that Joshua gave them; which, as their own Psalms prove, was no rest at all.

As to the order of the verses, the exhortation in verse 11 depends on the whole course of what precedes, the argument having been completed by the testimony of

David coming after Joshua. After the creation God indeed rested; but He said after that, “If they shall enter into my rest.” So that men had not entered into that rest. Joshua entered into the land; but the word by David, coming long after, proves that the rest of God was not yet attained. Nevertheless this same testimony, which forbade the entrance into rest because of unbelief, shewed that some are to enter in: otherwise there was no need of declaring the exclusion of others for an especial cause, nor warning men that they might escape what hindered their entering in. No parenthesis is needed.

Now, as long as any one had not ceased from his works, he had not entered into rest; he who has entered into it has ceased from work, even as God ceased from His own works when He entered into His rest. “Let us therefore use diligence” is the exhortation of the faithful witness of God, “that we may enter into that rest “—the rest of God—in order that we may not fall after the same example of unbelief.

We should especially observe here, that it is the rest of God which is spoken of. This enables us to understand the happiness and perfection of the rest. God must rest in that which satisfies His heart. This was the case even in creation—all was very good. And now it must be in a perfect blessing that perfect love can be satisfied with, with regard to us, who will possess a heavenly portion in the blessing which we shall have in His own presence, in perfect holiness and perfect light. Accordingly all the toilsome work of faith, the exercise of faith in the wilderness, the warfare (although there are many joys), the good works practised there, labour of every kind will cease. It is not only that we shall be delivered from the

power of indwelling sin; all the efforts and all the troubles of the new man will cease. We are already set free from the law of sin; then our spiritual exercise for God will cease. We shall rest from our works—not evil ones. We have already rested from our works with regard to justification, and therefore in that sense we have now rest in our consciences; but that is not the subject here—it is the Christian's rest from all his works. God rested from His works—assuredly good ones—and so shall we also then with Him.

We are now in the wilderness; we also wrestle with wicked spirits in heavenly places. A blessed rest remains for us, in which our hearts will repose in the presence of God, where nothing will trouble the perfection of our rest, where God will rest in the perfection of the blessing He has bestowed on His people.

The great thought of the passage is, that there remains a rest (that is to say, that the believer is not to expect it here) without saying where it is. And it does not speak in detail of the character of the rest, because it leaves the door open to an earthly rest for the earthly people on the ground of the promises, although to christian partakers of the heavenly calling God's rest is evidently a heavenly one.

The apostle then sets before us the instrument which God employs to judge the unbelief and all the workings of the heart which tend, as we have seen, to lead the believer into departure from the position of faith, and to hide God from him by inducing him to satisfy his flesh and to seek for rest in the wilderness.

To the believer who is upright in heart this judgment is of great value, as that which enables him to discern all

that has a tendency to hinder his progress or make him slacken his steps. It is the word of God, which—being the revelation of God, the expression of what He is, and of all that surrounds Him, and of what His will is in all the circumstances that surround us— judges everything in the heart which is not of Him. It is more penetrating than a two-edged sword. Living and energetic, it separates all that is most intimately linked together in our hearts and minds. Whenever nature—the “soul” and its feelings—mingles with that which is spiritual, it brings the edge of the sword of the living truth of God between the two, and judges the hidden movements of the heart respecting them. It discerns all the thoughts and intentions of the heart. But it has another character, coming from God (being, as it were. His eye upon the conscience), it brings us into His presence; and all that it forces us to discover, it sets in our conscience before the eye of God Himself. Nothing is hidden, all is naked and manifested to the eye of Him with whom we have to do.83 Such is the true help, the mighty instrument of God to judge everything in us that would hinder us from pursuing our course through the wilderness with joy, and with a buoyant heart strengthened by faith and confidence in Him. Precious instrument of a faithful God, solemn and serious in its operation; but of priceless and infinite blessing in its effects, in its consequences.

It is an instrument which, in its operations, does not allow “the desires of the flesh and of the mind” liberty to act; which does not permit the heart to deceive itself; but which procures us strength, and places us without any consciousness of evil in the presence of God, to pursue our course with joy and spiritual energy. Here

the exhortation, founded on the power of the word, concludes.

But there is another succour, one of a different character, to aid us in our passage through the wilderness; and that is priesthood—a subject which the epistle here begins and carries on through several chapters.

We have a High Priest who has passed through the heavens— as Aaron through the successive parts of the tabernacle—Jesus, the Son of God. He has, in all things, been tempted like ourselves, sin apart; so that He can sympathise with our infirmities. The word brings to light the intents of the heart, judges the will, and all that has not God for its object and its source. Then, as far as weakness is concerned, we have His sympathy. Christ of course had no evil desires: He was tempted in every way, apart from sin. Sin had no part in it at all. But I do not wish for sympathy with the sin that is in me; I detest it, I wish it to be mortified—judged unsparingly. This the word does. For my weakness and my difficulties I seek sympathy; and I find it in the priesthood of Jesus. It is not necessary, in order to sympathise with me, that a person should feel at the same moment that which I am feeling— rather the contrary. If I am suffering pain, I am not in a condition to think as much of another's pain. But in order to sympathise with him I must have a nature capable of appreciating his pain.

Thus it is with Jesus, when exercising His priesthood. He is in every sense beyond the reach of pain and trial, but He is man; and not only has He the human nature which in time suffered grief, but He experienced the trials a saint has to go through more fully than any of ourselves;

and His heart, free and full of love, can entirely sympathise with us, according to His experience of ill, and according to the glorious liberty which He now has, to provide and care for it. This encourages us to hold fast our profession in spite of the difficulties that beset our path; for Jesus concerns Himself about them, according to His own knowledge and experience of what they are, and according to the power of His grace.

Therefore, our High Priest being there, we can go with all boldness to the throne of grace, to find mercy and the grace suited to us in all times of need: mercy, because we are weak and wavering; needful grace, because we are engaged in a warfare which God owns.

Observe, it is not that we go to the High Priest. It is often done, and God may have compassion; but it is a proof that we do not fully understand grace. The Priest, the Lord Jesus, occupies Himself about us—sympathises with us, on the one hand; and on the other, we go directly to the throne of grace.

The Spirit does not here speak positively of falls; we find that in 1 John 2. There also it is in connection with communion with His Father, here with access to God. His purpose here is to strengthen us, to encourage us to persevere in the way, conscious of the sympathies which we possess in heaven, and that the throne is always open to us. {Heb 5}

Chapter 5. The epistle then develops the priesthood of the Lord Jesus, comparing it with that of Aaron; but, as we shall see, with a view to bring out the difference rather than the resemblance between them, although there is a general analogy, and the one was a shadow of the other.

This comparison is made in chapter 5:1-10. The line of argument is then interrupted, though the ground of argument is enlarged and developed, till the end of chapter 7, where the comparison with Melchizedec is pursued; and the change of law, consequent on the change of priesthood, is stated, which introduces the covenants and all that relates to the circumstances of the Jews.

A priest then as taken from among men (he is not here speaking of Christ, but of that with which he compares Him) is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he is able to feel the miseries of others, because he is himself compassed with infirmity, and offers therefore for himself as well as for the people. Moreover no one takes this honour to himself, but receives it, as Aaron did, being called of God. The epistle will speak farther on of the sacrifice—here of the person of the priest, and of the order of the priesthood.

So the Christ glorified not Himself to become a High Priest. The glory of His Person, manifested as man on the earth, and that of His function, are both of them plainly declared of God: the first, when He said, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Psa. 2); the second, in these words, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec” (Psa. 110). Such then in both personal and official glory is the High Priest, the expected Messiah, Christ.

But His glory (although it gives Him His place in honour before God, and consequent on redemption, so that He can undertake the people’s cause before God according to His will) does not bring Him near to the miseries of

men. It is His history on earth which makes us feel how truly able He is to take part in them. “In the days of his flesh,” that is, here below, He went into all the anguish of death in dependence on God, making His request to Him who was able to save Him from it. For, being here in order to obey and to suffer, He did not save Himself. He submitted to everything, obeyed in everything, and depended on God for everything.

He was heard because of His fear. It was proper that He who took death on Himself, as answering for others, should feel its whole weight upon His soul. He would neither escape the consequences of that which He had undertaken (compare chap. 2), nor fail in the just sense of what it was thus to be under the hand of God in judgment. His fear was His piety, the right estimation of the position in which sinful man was found, and what must come from God because of it. For Him however to suffer the consequences of this position was obedience. And this obedience was to be perfect, and to be tried to the utmost.

He was the Son, the glorious Son of God. But though this was so, He was to learn obedience (and to Him it was a new thing), what it was in the world, by all that He suffered. And, having deserved all glory, He was to take His place as the glorified Man—to be perfected; and in that position to become the cause of eternal salvation (not merely temporal deliverances) to them that obey Him; a salvation which should be connected with the position that He had taken in consequence of His work of obedience, saluted by God as “High Priest after the order of Melchizedec.”

That which follows to the end of chapter 6 is a parenthesis which refers to the condition of those to whom the epistle is addressed. They are blamed for the dullness of their spiritual intelligence, and encouraged at the same time by the promises of God; the whole with reference to their position as Jewish believers. Afterwards the line of instruction with regard to Melchizedec is resumed. For the time, they ought to have been able to teach: nevertheless they needed that some one should teach them the elements of the oracles of God—requiring milk instead of meat.

We may observe that there is no greater hindrance to progress in spiritual life and intelligence than attachment to an ancient form of religion, which, being traditional and not simply personal faith in the truth, consists always in ordinances, and is consequently carnal and earthly. Without this people may be unbelievers; but under the influence of such a system piety itself—expended in forms—makes a barrier between the soul and the light of God: and these forms which surround, preoccupy, and hold the affections captive, prevent them from enlarging and becoming enlightened by means of divine revelation. Morally (as the apostle here expresses it) the senses are not exercised to discern both good and evil.

But the Holy Ghost will not limit Himself to the narrow circle and the weak and futile sentiments of human tradition, nor even to those truths which, in a state like this, one is able to receive. In such a case Christ has not His true place. And this our epistle here develops.

Milk belongs to babes, solid food to those who are of full age. This infancy was the soul’s condition under the

ordinances and requirements of the law (compare Gal. 4:1-7). But there was a revelation of the Messiah in connection with these two states— of infancy and of manhood. And the development of the word of righteousness, of the true practical relationships of the soul to God according to His character and ways, was in proportion to the revelation of Christ, who is the manifestation of that character, and the centre of all those ways. Therefore it is that, in chapter 5:12, 13, the epistle speaks of the elements, the beginning, of the oracles of God, and of the word of righteousness; in chapter 6:1, of the word of the beginning, or of the first principles, of Christ.

Chapter 6. Now the Spirit will not stop at this point with Christians, but will go on to that full revelation of His glory which belongs to them that are of full age and indeed forms us for that state.

We easily perceive that the inspired writer tries to make the Hebrews feel that he was placing them on higher and more excellent ground, by connecting them with a heavenly and invisible Christ; and that Judaism kept them back in the position of children. This moreover characterises the whole epistle.

Nevertheless we shall find two things here: on the one hand, the elements and the character of doctrine that belonged to infancy, to “the beginning of the word of Christ,” in contrast with the strength and heavenly savour that accompanied the christian revelation; and, on the other hand, what the revelation of Christ Himself is in connection with this last spiritual and christian system.

But the epistle distinguishes between this system and the doctrine of the Person of Christ, even looked at as man,84 although the present position of Christ gives its character to the christian system. The distinction is made—not that the condition of souls does not depend on the measure of the revelation of Christ and of the position He has taken, but— because the doctrine of His Person and glory goes much farther than the present state of our relationship with God.

The things spoken of in chapter 6:i, 2, had their place, because the Messiah was then yet to come: all was in a state of infancy. The things spoken of in verses 4, 5, are the privileges that Christians enjoyed in virtue of the work and the glorification of the Messiah. But they are not in themselves the “perfection” mentioned in verse 1, and which relates rather to the knowledge of the Person of Christ Himself. The privileges in question were the effect of the glorious position of His Person in heaven.

It is important to attend to this, in order to understand these passages. In the infancy spoken of in verses 1, 2, the obscurity of the revelations of the Messiah, announced at most by promises and prophecies, left worshippers under the yoke of ceremonies and figures, although in possession of some fundamental truths. His exaltation made way for the power of the Holy Ghost here below: and on this the responsibility of souls which had tasted it depended.

The doctrine of the Person and the glory of Jesus forms the subject of revelation in the epistle, and was the means of deliverance for the Jews from the whole system which had been such a heavy burden on their hearts; it should prevent their forsaking the state

described in verses 4 and 5, in order to return into the weakness and (Christ having come) the carnal state of verses 1 and 2.

The epistle then does not desire to establish again the true but elementary doctrines which belonged to the times when Christ was not manifested, but to go forward to the full revelation of His glory and position according to the counsels of God revealed in the word.

The Holy Ghost would not go back again to these former things, because new things had been brought in in connection with the heavenly glory of the Messiah, namely, Christianity characterised by the power of the Holy Ghost.

But if any one who had been brought under that power, who had known it, should afterwards abandon it, he could not be renewed again to repentance. The former things of Judaism must be, and were, left behind by that into which he had entered. Christians could not deal with souls by them; and, as for the new things, he had given them up. All God's means had been employed for him and had produced nothing.

Such a one—of his own will—crucified for himself the Son of God. Associated with the people who had done so, he had acknowledged the sin which his people had committed, and owned Jesus to be the Messiah. But now he committed the crime,85 knowingly and of his own will.

The judgment, the resurrection of the dead, repentance from dead works, had been taught. Under that order of things the nation had crucified their Messiah. Now power had come; which testified of the glorification of the crucified Messiah, the Son of God, in heaven; and

which by miracles destroyed (at least in detail) the power of the enemy who was still reigning over the world. These miracles were a partial anticipation of the full and glorious deliverance which should take place in the world to come, when the triumphant Messiah, the Son of God, should entirely destroy all the power of the enemy. Hence they are called the “powers of the world to come.”

The power of the Holy Ghost, the miracles wrought in the bosom of Christianity, were testimonies that the power which was to accomplish that deliverance—although still hidden in heaven—existed nevertheless in the glorious Person of the Son of God. The power did not yet accomplish the deliverance of this world oppressed by Satan, because another thing was being done meanwhile. The light of God was shining, the good word of grace was being preached, the heavenly gift (a better thing than the deliverance of the world) was being tasted; and the sensible power of the Holy Ghost made itself known, while waiting for the return in glory of the Messiah to bind Satan, and thus accomplish the deliverance of the world under His dominion.

Speaking generally, the power of the Holy Ghost, the consequence of the Messiah’s being glorified above, was exercised on earth as a present manifestation and anticipation of the great deliverance to come. The revelation of grace, the good word of God, was preached; and the Christian lived in the sphere where these things displayed themselves, and was subjected to the influence exercised in it. This made itself to be felt by those who were brought in among Christians. Even where there was no spiritual life, these influences were felt.

But, after having been the subject of this influence of the presence of the Holy Ghost, after having tasted the revelation thus made of the goodness of God, and experienced the proofs of His power, if any one then forsook Christ, there remained no other means for restoring the soul, for leading it to repentance. The heavenly treasures were already expended: he had given them up as worthless; he had rejected the full revelation of grace and power, after having known it. What means could now be used? To return to Judaism, and the first principles of the doctrine of Christ in it, when the truth had been revealed, was impossible: and the new light had been known and rejected. In a case like this there was only the flesh; there was no new life. Thorns and briars were being produced as before. There was no real change in the man's state.

When once we have understood that this passage is a comparison of the power of the spiritual system with Judaism, and that it speaks of giving up the former, after having known it, its difficulty disappears. The possession of life is not supposed, nor is that question touched. The passage speaks, not of life, but of the Holy Ghost as a power present in Christianity. To "taste the good word "is to have understood how precious that word is; and not the having been quickened by its means."86 Hence in speaking to the Jewish Christians he hopes better things, and things which accompany salvation, so that all these things could be there and yet no salvation. Fruit there could not be; that supposes life.

The apostle does not however apply what he says to the Hebrew Christians: for, however low their state might be, there had been fruits, proofs of life, which in itself no

mere power is; and he continues his discourse by giving them encouragement, and motives for perseverance.

It will be observed, then, that this passage is a comparison between that which was possessed before and after Christ was glorified—the state and privileges of professors, at these two periods, without any question as to personal conversion. When the power of the Holy Ghost was present, and there was the full revelation of grace, if any forsook the assembly, fell away from Christ, and turned back again, there was no means of renewing them to repentance. The inspired writer therefore would not again lay the foundation of former things with regard to Christ—things already grown old—but would go on, for the profit of those who remained stedfast in the faith.

We may also remark how the epistle, in speaking of christian privileges, does not lose sight of the future earthly state, the glory and the privileges of the millennial world. The miracles are the miracles of the world to come; they belong to that period. The deliverance and the destruction of Satan's power should then be complete; those miracles were deliverances, samples of that power. We saw this point brought into notice (chap. 2:5) at the beginning of the doctrine of the epistle; and in chapter 4 the rest of God left vague in its character, in order to embrace both the heavenly part and the earthly part of our Lord's millennial reign. Here the present power of the Holy Ghost characterises the ways of God, Christianity; but the miracles are a foretaste of the coming age, in which the whole world will be blessed.

In the encouragements that it gives them, the epistle already calls to mind the principles by which the father of the faithful and of the Jewish nation had walked, and the way in which God had strengthened him in his faith. Abraham had to rest on promises, without possessing that which was promised; and this, with regard to rest and glory, was the state in which the Hebrew Christians then were. But at the same time, in order to give full assurance to the heart, God had confirmed His word by an oath, in order that they who build upon this hope of promised glory might have strong and satisfying consolation. And this assurance has received a still greater confirmation. It entered into that within the veil, it found its sanction in the sanctuary itself, whither a forerunner had entered, giving not only a word, an oath, but a personal guarantee for the fulfilment of these promises, and the sanctuary of God as a refuge for the heart; thus giving, for those who had spiritual understanding, a heavenly character to the hope which they cherished; while shewing, by the character of Him who had entered into heaven, the certain fulfilment of all the Old Testament promises, in connection with a heavenly Mediator, who, by His position, assured that fulfilment; establishing the earthly blessing upon the firm foundation of heaven itself, and giving at the same time a higher and more excellent character to that blessing by uniting it to heaven, and making it flow from thence.

We have thus the double character of blessing which this book again presents to our mind, in connection with the Person of the Messiah, and the whole linked by faith with Jesus. Jesus has entered into heaven as a Forerunner. He is there. We belong to that heaven. He is

there as High Priest. During the present time therefore His priesthood has a heavenly character; nevertheless He is priest, personally, after the order of Melchizedec. It sets aside then the whole Aaronic order, though the priesthood be exercised now after the analogy of Aaron's, but, by its nature, points out in the future a royalty which is not yet manifested. Now the very fact that this future royalty was connected with the Person of Him who was seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, according to Psalm no fixed the attention of the Hebrew Christian, when tempted to turn back, on Him who was in the heavens, and made him understand the priesthood which the Lord is now exercising; it delivered him from Judaism, and strengthened him in the heavenly character of the Christianity which he had embraced.

Chapter 7. The epistle, returning to the subject of Melchizedec, reviews therefore the dignity of his person and the importance of his priesthood. For on priesthood, as a means of drawing nigh to God, the whole system connected with it depended.

Melchizedec then (a typical and characteristic person, as the use of his name in Psalm no proves) was king of Salem, that is king of peace, and, by name, king of righteousness. Righteousness and peace characterise his reign. But above all he was priest of the Most High God. This is the name of God as supreme Governor of all things—Possessor, as is added in Genesis, of heaven and earth. It is thus that Nebuchadnezzar, the humbled earthly potentate, acknowledged Him. It was thus He revealed Himself to Abraham, when Melchizedec blessed the patriarch after he had conquered his enemies. In connection with his walk of faith, the name of God for Abraham was "The Almighty." Here Abraham,

victorious over the kings of the earth, is blessed by Melchizedec, by the king of righteousness, in connection with God as Possessor of heaven and earth, the Most High. This looks onward to the royalty of Christ, a Priest upon His throne, when by the will and the power of God He shall have triumphed over all His enemies—a time not yet arrived—first fulfilled in the millennium, as it is commonly expressed, though this rather refers to the earthly part. Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedec. His royalty was not all, for Psalm no is very clear in describing Melchizedec as priest, and as possessing a lasting and uninterrupted priesthood. He had no sacerdotal parentage from whom he derived his priesthood. As a priest, he had neither father nor mother; unlike the sons of Aaron, he had no genealogy (compare Ezra 2:62); he had no limits assigned to the term of his priestly service, as was the case with the sons of Aaron (Num. 4:3). He was made a priest, like—in his priestly character—to the Son of God; but, as yet, the latter is in heaven.

The fact that he received tithes from Abraham, and that he blessed Abraham, shewed the high and pre-eminent dignity of this otherwise unknown and mysterious personage. The only thing that is testified of him—without naming father or mother, commencement of life, or death that may have taken place—is that he lived.

The dignity of his person was beyond that of Abraham, the depositary of the promises; that of his priesthood was above Aaron’s, who in Abraham paid the tithes which Levi himself received from his brethren. The priesthood then is changed, and with it the whole system that depended on it.

Psalm no interpreted by faith in Christ—for the epistle, we need not say, speaks always to Christians—is still the point on which its argument is founded. The first proof then, that the whole was changed, is that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah (a Priest after the order of Melchizedec), did not spring evidently from the sacerdotal tribe, but from another, namely, that of Judah. For that Jesus was the Messiah, they believed. But, according to the Jewish scriptures, the Messiah was such as He is here presented; and in that case the priesthood was changed, and with it the whole system. And this was not only a consequence that must be drawn from the fact that the Messiah was of the tribe of Judah, although a Priest; but it was requisite that another priest than the priest of Aaron's family should arise, and one after the similitude of Melchizedec, who should not be after the law of a commandment which had no more power than the flesh to which it was applied, but who should be according to the power of a never ending life. The testimony of the psalm to this was positive: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec." For there is in fact a disannulling of the commandment that existed previously, because it was unprofitable (for the law brought nothing to perfection); and there is the bringing in of a better hope, by which we draw nigh to God.

Precious difference! A commandment to man, sinful and afar from God, replaced by a hope, a confidence, founded on grace and on divine promise, through which we can come even into God's presence.

The law, doubtless, was good; but separation still subsisted between man and God. The law made nothing perfect. God was ever perfect, and human perfection was required; all must be according to what divine

perfection required of man. But sin was there, and the law was consequently without power (save to condemn); its ceremonies and ordinances were but figures, and a heavy yoke. Even that which temporarily relieved the conscience brought sin to mind and never made the conscience perfect towards God. They were still at a distance from Him. Grace brings the soul to God, who is known in love and in a righteousness which is for us.

The character of the new priesthood bore the stamp, in all its features, of its superiority to that which existed under the order of the law and with which the whole system of the law either stood or fell.

The covenant connected with the new priesthood answered likewise to the superiority of the latter over the former priesthood.

The priesthood of Jesus was established by oath; that of Aaron was not. The priesthood of Aaron passed from one person to another, because death put an end to its exercise by the individuals who were invested with it. But Jesus abides the same for ever; He has a priesthood that is not transmitted to others. Thus He saves completely, and to the end, those that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever lives to intercede for them.

Accordingly “such a high priest became us.” Glorious thought! Called to be in the presence of God, to be in relationship with Him in the heavenly glory, to draw near to Him on high, where nothing that defiles can enter, we needed a High Priest in the place to which access was given us (as the Jews in the earthly temple), and such a One as the glory and purity of heaven required. What a demonstration that we belong to heaven, and of the exalted nature of our relationship

with God! Such a Priest became us: “Holy, harmless, undented, separate from sinners, exalted above the heavens” —for so are we, as to our position, having to do with God there—a Priest who needs not to renew the sacrifices, as though any work to put away sin still remained to be done, or their sins could still be imputed to believers; for then it would be impossible to stay in the heavenly sanctuary. As having once for all completed His work for the putting away of sin, our Priest offered His sacrifice once for all when He offered up Himself.

For the law made high priests who had the infirmities of men, for they were men themselves; the oath of God, which came after the law, establishes the Son, when He is perfected for ever, consecrated in heaven unto God.

We see here that, although there was an analogy and the figures of heavenly things, there is more of contrast than of comparison in this epistle. The legal priests had the same infirmities as other men; Jesus has a glorified priesthood according to the power of an endless life.

The introduction of this new priesthood, exercised in heaven, implies a change in the sacrifices and in the covenant. This the inspired writer develops here, setting forth the value of the sacrifice of Christ, and the long-promised new covenant. The direct connection is with the sacrifices; but he turns aside for a moment to the two covenants, a so wide-embracing and all-weighty consideration for the christian Jew who had been under the first.

Chapter 8 in this respect is simple and clear; the last verses only give room for a few remarks.

The sum of the doctrine we have been considering is, that we have a High Priest who is seated on the throne

of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the heavenly sanctuary which is not made with hands. As such, He must have an offering to present there. Jesus, were He on earth, would not be a Priest; there were priests on earth according to the law, in which all things were but figures of the heavenly things; as Moses was told to make all according to the pattern that was shewn him in the mount. But the ministry of Jesus is more excellent, because He is the Mediator of a better covenant, spoken of in Jeremiah 31, which is here quoted; a clear and simple proof that the first covenant was not to continue.

We again find here that particular development of the truth which was called for by the character of the persons to whom this letter was addressed.

The first covenant was made with Israel; the second must be so likewise, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah. The epistle however in this passage only makes use of the fact that there was to be a second covenant, in order to demonstrate that the first was to last no longer. It had grown old, and was to vanish away. He recites the terms of the new covenant. We shall find that he makes use of it afterwards. In that which follows, he contrasts the services that belonged to the first with the perfect work on which Christianity is founded. Thus the extent and the value of the work of Christ are introduced.

Although there is no difficulty here, it is important to have light with regard to these two covenants, because some have very vague ideas on this point, and many souls, putting themselves under covenants—that is, in relationship with God under conditions in which He has not placed them—lose their simplicity, and do not hold

fast grace and the fulness of the work of Christ, and the position He has acquired for them in heaven.

A covenant is a principle of relationship with God on the earth—conditions established by God under which man is to live with Him. The word may perhaps be used figuratively, or by accommodation. It is applied to details of the relationship of God with Israel, and so to Abraham (Gen. 15), and like cases; but, strictly speaking, there are but two covenants, in which God has dealt with man on earth, or will—the old and the new. The old was established at Sinai. The new covenant is made also with the two houses of Israel.87 The gospel is not a covenant, but the revelation of the salvation of God. It proclaims the great salvation. We enjoy indeed all the essential privileges of the new covenant, its foundation being laid on God's part in the blood of Christ, but we do so in spirit, not according to the letter.

The new covenant will be established formally with Israel in the millennium. Meanwhile the old covenant is judged by the fact that there is a new one.

Chapter 9. The epistle, recounting some particular circumstances which characterised the first covenant, shews that neither were sins put away, nor was the conscience purged by its means, nor the entrance into the holiest granted to the worshippers. The veil concealed God. The high priest went in once a year to make reconciliation—no one else. The way to God in holiness was barred. Perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, they could not be through the blood of bulls and of goats. These were but pro visionary and figurative ordinances, until God took up the real work itself, in order to accomplish it fully and for ever.

But this brings us to the focus of the light which God gives us by the Holy Ghost in this epistle. Before proving by the scriptures of the Old Testament the doctrine that he announced, and the discontinuance of the legal sacrifices—of all sacrifice for sin, the writer, with a heart full of the truth and of the importance of that truth, teaches the value and the extent of the sacrifice of Christ (still in contrast with the former offerings, but a contrast that rests on the intrinsic value of the offering of Christ). These three results are presented:—first, the opened way into the sanctuary was manifested; that is, access to God Himself, where He is; second, the purification of the conscience; third, an eternal redemption; I may add the promise of an eternal inheritance.

One feels the immense importance, the inestimable value, of the first. The believer is admitted into God's own presence by a new and living way which He has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say. His flesh; has constant access to God, immediate access to the place where He is, in the light. What complete salvation, what blessedness, what security! For how could we have access to God in the light, if everything that would separate us from Him, were not entirely taken away through Him who was once offered to bear the sins of many? But here it is the precious and perfect result, in this respect, which is revealed to us, and formally proved in chapter 10, as a right that we possess, that access to God Himself is entirely and freely open to us. We are not indeed told in this passage that we are seated there, for it is not our union with Christ that is the subject of this epistle, but our access to God in the sanctuary. And it is important to note this last, and

it is as precious in its place as the other. We are viewed as on earth, and being on earth we have free and full access to God in the sanctuary. We go in perfect liberty to God, where His holiness dwells, and where nothing that is contrary to Him can be admitted. What happiness! What perfect grace! What a glorious result, supreme and complete! Could anything better be desired, remembering too that it is our dwelling-place? This is our position in the presence of God through the entrance of Christ into the sanctuary.

The second result shews us the personal state we are brought into, in order to the enjoyment of our position; that we may on our part, enter in freely. It is that our Saviour has rendered our conscience perfect, so that we can go into the sanctuary without an idea of fear, without one question as to sin arising in our minds. A perfect conscience is not an innocent conscience which, happy in its unconsciousness, does not know evil, and does not know God revealed in holiness. A perfect conscience knows God; it is cleansed, and, having the knowledge of good and evil according to the light of God Himself, it knows that it is purified from all evil according to His purity. Now the blood of bulls and goats, and the washings repeated under the law, could never make the conscience perfect. They could sanctify carnally, so as to enable the worshipper to approach God outwardly, yet only afar off, with the veil still unrent. But a real purification from sin and sins, so that the soul can be in the presence of God Himself in the light without spot, with the consciousness of being so, the offerings under the law could never produce. They were but figures. But, thanks be to God, Christ has accomplished the work; and, present for us now in the heavenly and

eternal sanctuary, He is the witness there that our sins are put away; so that all conscience of sin before God is destroyed, because we know that He who bore our sins is in the presence of God, after having accomplished the work of expiation. Thus we have the consciousness of being in the light without spot. We have the purification not only of sins but of the conscience, so that we can use this access to God in full liberty and joy, presenting ourselves before Him who has so loved us.

The third result, which seals and characterises the two others, is that Christ, having once entered in, abides in heaven. He has gone into the heavenly sanctuary to remain there by virtue of an eternal redemption, of blood that has everlasting validity. The work is completely done, and can never change in value. If our sins are effectually put away, God glorified, and righteousness complete, that which once availed to effect this can never not avail. The blood shed once for all is ever efficacious.

Our High Priest is in the sanctuary, not with the blood of sacrifices, which are but figures of the true. The work has been done which puts sin away. This redemption is neither temporal nor transitory. It is the redemption of the soul, and for eternity, according to the moral efficacy of that which has been done.

Here then are the three aspects of the result of the work of Christ: immediate access to God; a purged conscience; an eternal redemption.

Three points remain to be noticed before entering on the subjects of the covenants, which is here resumed.

First, Christ is a High Priest of good things to come. In saying “things to come,” the starting-point is Israel

under the law before the advent of our Lord. Nevertheless, if these good things were now acquired, if it could be said, “we have them,” because Christianity was their fulfilment, it could hardly be still said—when Christianity was established—“good things to come.” They are yet to come. These “good things “consist of all that the Messiah will enjoy when He reigns. This also is the reason that the earthly things have their place. But our present relationship with Him is only and altogether heavenly. He acts as Priest in a tabernacle which is not of this creation: it is heavenly, in the presence of God, not made with hands. Our place is in heaven.

In the second place, “Christ offered himself, by the eternal Spirit,88 without spot, to God.” Here the precious offering up of Christ is viewed as an act that He performed as man, though in the perfection and value of His Person. He offered Himself to God—but as moved by the power, and according to the perfection of the eternal Spirit. All the motives that governed this action, and the accomplishment of the fact according to those motives, were purely and perfectly those of the Holy Ghost; that is, absolutely divine in their perfection, but of the Holy Ghost acting in a man (a man without sin who, born and living ever by the power of the Holy Ghost, had never known sin; who, being exempt from it by birth, never allowed it to enter into Him); so that it is the Man Christ who offers Himself. This was requisite.

Thus the offering was in itself perfect and pure, without defilement; and the act of offering was perfect, whether in love or in obedience, or in the desire to glorify God, or to accomplish the purpose of God. Nothing mingled itself with the perfection of His intent in offering Himself.

Moreover, it was not a temporary offering, which applied to one sin with which the conscience was burdened and which went no farther than that one, an offering which could not, by its nature, have the perfection spoken of, because it was not the Person offering up Himself, nor was it absolutely for God, because there was in it neither the perfection of will nor of obedience. But the offering of Christ was one which, being perfect in its moral nature, being in itself perfect in the eyes of God, was necessarily eternal in its value. For this value was as enduring as the nature of God who was glorified in it. It was made, not of necessity, but of free will, and in obedience. It was made by a Man for the glory of God, but through the eternal Spirit, ever the same in its nature and value.

All being thus perfectly fulfilled for the glory of God, the conscience of every one that comes to Him by this offering is purged; dead works are blotted out and set aside; we stand before God on the ground of that which Christ has done.

And here the third point comes in. Being perfectly cleansed in conscience from all that man in his sinful nature produces, and having to do with God in light and in love, there being no question of conscience with Him, we are in a position to serve the living God. Precious liberty! in which, happy and without question before God according to His nature in light, we can serve Him according to the activity of His nature in love. Judaism knew no more of this than it did of perfection in conscience. Obligation towards God that system indeed maintained; and it offered a certain provision for that which was needed for outward failure. But to have a perfect conscience, and then to serve God in love,

according to His will— of this it knew nothing. This is christian position: the conscience perfect by Christ,89 according to the nature of God Himself; the service of God in liberty, according to His nature of love acting towards others.

For the Jewish system, in its utmost advantages, was characterised by the holy place. There were duties and obligations to be fulfilled in order to draw near, sacrifices to cleanse outwardly him who drew near outwardly. Meanwhile God was always concealed. No one entered into “the holy place”: it is implied that the “most holy” was inaccessible. No sacrifice had yet been offered which gave free access, and at all times. God was concealed: that He was so characterised the position. They could not stand before Him. Neither did He manifest Himself. They served Him out of His presence without going in.

It is important to notice this truth, that the whole system in its highest and nearest access to God was characterised by the holy place, in order to understand the passage before us.

Now the first tabernacle—Judaism as a system—is identified with the first part of the tabernacle, and that open only to the priestly part of the nation, the second part (that is, the sanctuary) only shewing, by the circumstances connected with it, that there was no access to God. When the author of the epistle goes on to the present position of Christ, he leaves the earthly tabernacle—it is heaven itself he then speaks of, a tabernacle not made with hands, nor of this creation, into which he introduces us.

The first tent or part of the tabernacle gave the character of the relationship of the people with God, and that only by a priesthood. They could not reach God. When we approach God Himself, it is in heaven; and the entire first system disappears. Everything was offered as a figure in the first system, and even as a figure shewed that the conscience was not yet set free, nor the presence of God accessible to man. The remembrance of sins was continually renewed (the annual sacrifice was a memorial of sins, and God was not manifested, nor the way to Him opened).

Christ comes, accomplishes the sacrifice, makes the conscience perfect, goes into heaven itself; and we draw nigh to God in the light. To mingle the service of the first tabernacle or holy place with christian service is to deny the latter; for the meaning of the first was that the way to God was not yet open; the meaning of the second, that it is open.

God may have patience with the weakness of man. Till the destruction of Jerusalem He bore with the Jews; but the two systems can never really go on together, namely, a system which said that one cannot draw nigh to God, and another system which gives access to Him.

Christ is come, the High Priest of a new system, of "good things," which, under the old system, were yet "to come"; but He did not enter into the earthly "most holy place," leaving the "holy place" to subsist without a true meaning. He is come by the (not a) more excellent and more perfect tabernacle. I repeat it, for it is essential here: the holy place, or the first tent, is the figure of the relationship of men with God under the first tabernacle (taken as a whole); so that we may say, "the first

tabernacle," applying it to the first part of the tabernacle, and pass on to the first tabernacle as a whole, and as a recognised period having the same meaning. This the epistle does here. To come out of this position, we must leave typical things and pass into heaven, the true sanctuary where Christ ever lives, and where no veil bars our entrance.

Now it is not said, that we have "the good things to come." Christ has gone into heaven itself, the High Priest of those good things, securing their possession to them that trust in Him. But we have access to90 God in the light by virtue of Christ's presence there. That presence is the proof of righteousness fully established; the blood, an evidence that our sins are put away for ever; and our conscience is made perfect. Christ in heaven is the guarantee for the fulfilment of every promise. He has opened an access for us, even now, to God in the light, having cleansed our consciences once for all—for He dwells on high continuously—that we may enter in, and that we may serve God here below. All this is already established and secured; but there is more. The new covenant, of which He is Mediator, is founded on His blood. The way in which the apostle always avoids the direct application of the new covenant is very striking.

The transgressions that were imputed under the first covenant, and which the sacrifices it offered could not expiate, are by the blood of the new covenant entirely blotted out. Thus they which are called—observe the expression (v. 15)—can receive the promise of the eternal inheritance; that is to say, the foundation is laid for the accomplishment of the blessings of the covenant. He says, "the eternal inheritance," because, as we have

seen, the reconciliation was complete, our sins borne and cancelled, and the work by which sin is finally put away out of God's sight accomplished, according to the nature and character of God Himself. This is the main point of all this part of the epistle.

It is because of the necessity there was for this sacrifice —the necessity that sins, and finally sin, should be entirely put away,91 in order to the enjoyment of the eternal promises (for God could not bless, as an eternal principle and definitively, while sin was before His eyes), that Christ, the Son of God, Man on earth, became the Mediator of the new covenant, in order that by death He might make a way for the permanent enjoyment of that which had been promised. The new covenant, in itself, did not speak of a Mediator. God would write His laws on the hearts of His people, and would remember sins no more.

The covenant is not yet made with Israel and Judah. But meanwhile God has established and revealed the Mediator, who has accomplished the work on which the fulfilment of the promises can be founded in a way that is durable in principle, eternal, because connected with the nature of God Himself. This is done by means of death, the wages of sin, and by which sin is left behind; and expiation for sins being made according to the righteousness of God, an altogether new position is taken outside and beyond sin. The Mediator has paid the ransom. Sin has no more right over us.

Verses 16, 17 are a parenthesis, in which the idea of a "testament" (it is the same word as "covenant" in the Greek, a disposition on the part of one who has the right of disposal) is introduced, to make us understand that

death must have taken place before the rights acquired under the testament can be enjoyed.92 This necessity of the covenant being founded on the blood of a victim was not forgotten in the case of the first covenant. Everything was sprinkled with blood. Only, in this case, it was the solemn sanction of death attached to the obligation of the covenant. The types always spoke of the necessity of death intervening before men could be in relationship with God. Sin had brought in death and judgment. We must either undergo the judgment ourselves, or see our sins blotted out through it having been undergone by another for us.

Three applications of the blood are presented here. The covenant is founded on the blood. Defilement is washed away by its means. Guilt is removed by the remission obtained through the blood that has been shed.

These are, in fact, the three things necessary. First, the ways of God in bestowing blessing according to His promises are connected with His righteousness, the sins of those blessed being atoned for, the requisite foundation of the covenant, Christ having withal glorified God in respect of sin, when made sin on the cross.

Second, the purification of the sin by which we were defiled (by which all things, that could not be guilty, were nevertheless defiled) is accomplished. Here there were cases in which water was typically used: this is moral and practical cleansing. It flows from death; the water that purifies proceeded from the side of the holy Victim already dead. It is the application of the word—which judges all evil and reveals all good—to the conscience and the heart.

Third, as regards remission. In no case can this be obtained without the shedding of blood. Observe that it does not here say “application.” It is the accomplishment of the work of true propitiation, which is here spoken of. Without shedding of blood there is no remission. All-important truth! For a work of remission, death and blood-shedding must take place.

Two consequences flow from these views of atonement and reconciliation to God.

First, it was necessary that there should be a better sacrifice, a more excellent victim, than those which were offered under the old covenant, because it was the heavenly things themselves, and not their figures, that were to be purified. For it is into the presence of God in heaven itself that Christ has entered.

Second, Christ was not to offer Himself often, as the high priest went in every year with the blood of others. For He offered up Himself. Hence, if all that was available in the sacrifice was not brought to perfection by a single offering once made, He must have suffered often since the foundation of the world.93 This remark leads to the clear and simple declaration of the ways of God on this point—a declaration of priceless value. God allowed ages to pass (the different distinct periods in which man has in divers ways been put to the test, and in which he has had time to shew what he is) without yet accomplishing His work of grace. This trial of man has served to shew that he is bad in nature and in will. The multiplication of means only made it more evident that he was essentially bad at heart, for he availed himself of none of them to draw near to God. On the contrary, his enmity against God was fully manifested.

When God had made this plain, before the law, under the law, by promises, by the coming and presence of His Son, then the work of God takes the place, for our salvation and God's glory, of man's responsibility—on the ground of which faith knows man is entirely lost. This explains the expression (v. 26) "in the consummation of the ages."

Now this work is perfect, and perfectly accomplished. Sin had dishonoured God, and separated man from Him. All that God had done to give him the means of return only ended in affording him opportunity to fill up the measure of his sin by the rejection of Jesus. But in this the eternal counsels of God were fulfilled, at least the moral basis laid, and that in infinite perfection, for their actual accomplishment in their results. All now in fact, as in purpose always, rested on the second Adam, and on what God had done, not on man's responsibility, while that was fully met for God's glory (compare 2 Tim. 1:9, 10; Titus 1:1, 2). The Christ, whom man rejected, had appeared in order to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Thus it was morally the consummation of the ages.

The result of the work and power of God are not yet manifested, A new creation will develop them. But man, as the child of Adam, has run his whole career in his relationship with God: he is enmity against God. Christ, fulfilling the will of God, has come in the consummation of ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and His work to this end is accomplished. This is the moral power of His act,94 of His sacrifice before God; in result, sin will be entirely blotted out of the heavens and the earth. To faith this result, namely, the putting away of sin, is already realised in the conscience,95 because

Christ who was made sin for us has died and died to sin, and now is risen and glorified, sin (even as made it for us) left behind.

Moreover, this result is announced to the believer—to those who are looking for the Lord's return. Death and judgment are the lot of men as children of Adam. Christ has been offered once to bear the sins of many; and "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation," not to judgment.

For them, as to their standing before God, sin is even now put away: as Christ is, so are they; their own sins are all blotted out. Christ appeared the first time in order to be made sin for us, and to bear our sins; they were laid upon Him on the cross. And, with regard to those who wait for Him, those sins are entirely put away. When He returns, Christ has nothing to do with sin, as far as they are concerned. It was fully dealt with at His first coming. He appears the second time to deliver them from all the results of sin, from all bondage. He will appear, not for judgment, but unto salvation. The putting away of sin on their behalf before God has been so complete, the sins of believers so entirely blotted out, that, when He appears the second time, He has, as to them, nothing to do with sin. He appears apart from sin, not only without sin in His blessed Person—this was the case at His first coming— but (as to those who look for Him) outside all question of sin, for their final deliverance, "Without sin" is in contrast with "to bear the sins of many."96 But it will be remarked, that the taking up of the assembly is not mentioned here. It is well to notice the language. The character of His second coming is the subject. He has been manifested once. Now He is seen by those who look for Him. The

expression may apply to the deliverance of the Jews who wait for Him in the last days. He will appear for their deliverance. But we expect the Lord for this deliverance, and we shall see Him when He accomplishes it even for us. The apostle does not touch the question of the difference between this and our being caught up, and does not use the word which serves to announce His public manifestation. He will appear to those who expect Him. He is not seen by all the world, nor is it consequently the judgment, although that may follow. The Holy Ghost speaks only of them that look for the Lord. To them He will appear. By them He will be seen, and it will be the time of their deliverance; so that it is true for us, and also applicable to the Jewish remnant in the last days.

Thus the christian position, and the hope of the world to come, founded on the blood and on the Mediator of the new covenant, are both given here. The one is the present portion of the believer, the other is secured as the hope of Israel.

How wonderful is the grace which we are now considering!

There are two things that present themselves to us in Christ— the attractions to our heart of His grace and goodness, and His work which brings our souls into the presence of God. It is with the latter that the Holy Ghost here occupies us. There is not only the piety which grace produces; there is the efficacy of the work itself. What is this efficacy? What is the result for us of His work? Access to God in the light without a veil, ourselves entirely clear of all sin before Him, as white as snow in the light which only shews it. Marvellous position for us!

We have not to wait for a day of judgment (assuredly coming as it is), nor to seek for means of approach to God. We are in His presence. Christ appears in the presence of God for us; and not only this: He remains there ever; our position therefore never changes. It is true that we are called to walk according to that position. But this does not touch the fact that such is the position. And how came we into it? and in what condition? Our sins entirely put away, perfectly put away, and once for all, and the whole question of sin settled for ever before God, we are there because Christ has finished the work which abolished it, and without it in God's sight. So that there are the two things—this work accomplished, and this position ours in the presence of God.

We see the force of the contrast between this and Judaism. According to the latter, divine service, as we have seen, was performed outside the veil. The worshippers did not reach the presence of God. Thus they had always to begin again. The propitiatory sacrifice was renewed from year to year—a continually repeated testimony that sin still was there. Individually they obtained a temporary pardon for particular acts. It had constantly to be renewed. The conscience was never made perfect, the soul was not in the presence of God, this great question was never settled. (How many souls are even now in this condition!) The entrance of the high priest once a year did but furnish a proof that the way was still barred, that God could not be approached, but that sin was still remembered.

But now the guilt of believers is gone, their sins washed away by a work done once for all; the conscience is made perfect; nor is there any condemnation for them.

Sin in the flesh has been condemned in Christ when a sacrifice for sin, and Christ appears ever in the presence of God for us. The High Priest remains there. Thus, instead of having a memorial of sin reiterated from year to year, perfect righteousness subsists ever for us in the presence of God. The position is entirely changed.

The lot of man (for this perfect work takes us out of Judaism) is death and judgment. But now our lot depends on Christ, not on Adam. Christ was offered to bear the sins of many97— the work is complete, the sins blotted out, and to those who look for Him He will appear without having anything to do with sin, that question having been entirely settled at His first coming. In the death of Jesus, God dealt with the sins of those who look for Him; and He will appear, not to judge, but unto salvation—to deliver them finally from the position into which sin had brought them. This will have its application to the Jewish remnant according to the circumstances of their position; but in an absolute way it applies to the Christian, who has heaven for his portion.

The essential point established in the doctrine of the death of Christ is, that He offered Himself once for all. We must bear this in mind, to understand the full import of all that is here said. The tenth chapter is the development and application of this. In it the author recapitulates his doctrine on this point, and applies it to souls, confirming it by scripture, and by considerations which are evident to every enlightened conscience.

I. The law, with its sacrifices, did not make the worshippers perfect; for, if they had been brought to perfection, the sacrifices would not have been offered afresh. If they were offered again, it was because the

worshippers were not perfect. On the contrary the repetition of the sacrifice was a memorial of sins; it reminded the people that sin was still there, and that it was still before God. In effect the law, although it was the shadow of things to come, was not their true image. There were sacrifices; but they were repeated, instead of there being one only sacrifice of eternal efficacy. There was a high priest, but he was mortal, and the priesthood transmissible. He went into the holiest, but only once a year, the veil which concealed God being unrent, and the high priest unable to remain in His presence, the work being not perfect. Thus there were indeed elements which plainly indicated the constituent parts, so to speak, of the priesthood of the good things to come; but the state of the worshippers was in the one case quite the opposite of that which it was in the other. In the first, every act shewed that the work of reconciliation was not done; in the second, the position of the high priest and of the worshipper is a testimony that this work has been accomplished, and that the latter are perfected for ever in the presence of God. {Heb 10}

In chapter 10 this principle is applied to the sacrifice. Its repetition proved that sin was there. That the sacrifice of Christ was only offered once, was the demonstration of its eternal efficacy. Had the Jewish sacrifices rendered the worshippers really perfect before God, they would have ceased to be offered. The apostle is speaking (although the principle is general) of the yearly sacrifice on the day of atonement. For if, through the efficacy of the sacrifice, they had been permanently made perfect, they would have had no more conscience of sins, and

could not have had the thought of renewing the sacrifice.

Observe, here, that which is very important, that the conscience is cleansed, our sins being expiated, the worshipper drawing nigh by virtue of the sacrifice. The meaning of the Jewish service was that guilt was still there; that of the Christian, that it is gone. As to the former, precious as the type is, the reason is evident: the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin. Therefore those sacrifices have been abolished, and a work of another character (although still a sacrifice) has been accomplished—a work which excludes all other, and all the repetition of the same, because it consists of nothing less than the self-devotedness of the Son of God to accomplish the will of God, and the completion of that to which He was devoted: an act impossible to be repeated, for all His will cannot be accomplished twice, and, were it possible, it would be a testimony of the inadequacy of the first, and so of both.

This is what the Son of God says in this most solemn passage (v. 5-9), in which we are admitted to know, according to the grace of God, that which passed between God the Father and Himself, when He undertook the fulfilment of the will of God— that which He said, and the eternal counsels of God which He carried into execution. He takes the place of submission and of obedience, of performing the will of another. God would no longer accept the sacrifices that were offered under the law (the four classes of which are here pointed out), He had no pleasure in them. In their stead He had prepared a body for His Son; vast and important truth! for the place of man is obedience. Thus, in taking this place, the Son of God put Himself into the position

to obey perfectly. In fact He undertakes the duty of fulfilling all the will of God, be it what it may— a will which is ever “good, acceptable, and perfect.”

The psalm says, in the Hebrew, “Thou hast digged98 ears for me,” translated in the Septuagint, “Thou hast prepared me a body”; words which, as they give the true meaning, are used by the Holy Ghost. For “the ear” is always employed as a sign of the reception of commandments, and the principle of obligation to obey, or the disposition to do so. “He hath opened mine ear morning by morning” (Isa. 50), that is, has made me listen to His will, be obedient to His commands. The ear was bored, or fastened with an awl to the door, in order to express that the Israelite was attached to the house as a slave, to obey, for ever. Now in taking a body, the Lord took the form of a servant (Phil. 2). Ears were digged for Him. That is to say, He placed Himself in a position in which He had to obey all His Master’s will, whatever it might be. But it is the Lord Himself99 who speaks in the passage before us: “Thou,” He says, “hast prepared me a body.”

Entering more into detail, He specifies burnt offerings and offerings for sin, sacrifices which had less of the character of communion, and thus had a deeper meaning; but God had no pleasure in them. In a word the Jewish service was already declared by the Spirit to be unacceptable to God. It was all to cease, it was fruitless; no offering that formed part of it was acceptable. No; the counsels of God unfold themselves, but first of all in the heart of the Word, the Son of God, who offers Himself to accomplish the will of God. “Then said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God.” Nothing can be more

solemn than thus to lift the veil from that which takes place in heaven between God and the Word who undertook to do His will. Observe that, before He was in the position of obedience, He offers Himself in order to accomplish the will of God, that is to say, of free love for the glory of God, of free will; as One who had the power, He offers Himself. He undertakes obedience, He undertakes to do whatsoever God wills. This is indeed to sacrifice all His own will, but freely and as the effect of His own purpose, although on the occasion of the will of His Father. He must needs be God in order to do this, and to undertake the fulfilment of all that God could will.

We have here the great mystery of this divine intercourse, which remains ever surrounded with its solemn majesty, although it is communicated to us that we may know it. And we ought to know it; for it is thus that we understand the infinite grace and the glory of this work. Before He became man, in the place where only divinity is known, and its eternal counsels and thoughts are communicated between the divine Persons, the Word—as He has declared it to us, in time, by the prophetic Spirit—such being the will of God contained in the book of the eternal counsels, He who was able to do it, offered Himself freely to accomplish that will. Submissive to this counsel already arranged for Him, He yet offers Himself in perfect freedom to fulfil it. But in offering He submits, yet at the same time undertakes to do all that God, as God, willed. But also in undertaking to do the will of God, it was in the way of obedience, of submission, and of devotedness. For I might undertake to do the will of another, as free and competent, because I willed the thing; but if I say “to do thy will,” this in itself is absolute and complete submission. And this it is

which the Lord, the Word, did. He did it also, declaring that He came in order to do it. He took a position of obedience by accepting the body prepared for Him. He came to do the will of God.

That of which we have been speaking is continually manifested in the life of Jesus on earth. God shines through His position in the human body; for He was necessarily God in the act itself of His humiliation; and none but God could have undertaken and been found in it; yet He was always, and entirely and perfectly, obedient and dependent on God. That which revealed itself in His existence on earth was the expression of that which was accomplished in the eternal abode, in His own nature. That is to say (and of this Psalm 40 speaks), that which He declares, and that which He was here below, are the same thing; the one in reality in heaven, the other bodily on earth. That which He was here below was but the expression, the living, real, bodily manifestation of what is contained in those divine communications which have been revealed to us, and which were the reality of the position that He assumed.

And it is very important to see these things in the free offer made by divine competency, and not only in their fulfilment in death. It gives quite a different character to the bodily work here below.

In reality, from chapter 1 of this epistle, the Holy Ghost always presents Christ in this way. But this revelation in the psalm was requisite to explain how He became a servant, what the Messiah really was; and to us it opens an immense view of the ways of God, a view, the depths of which—clearly as it is revealed, and through the very clearness of the revelation— display to us things so

divine and glorious that we bow the head and veil our faces, as having had part as it were in such communications, on account of the majesty of the Persons whose acts and whose intimate relationships are revealed. It is not here the glory that dazzles us. But even in this poor world there is nothing to which we are greater strangers than the intimacy of those who are, in their modes of life, much above ourselves. What then, when it is that of God! Blessed be His name! there is grace that brings us into it, and that has drawn nigh to us in our weakness. We are then admitted to know this precious truth, that the Lord Jesus undertook of His own free will the accomplishment of all the will of God, and that He was pleased to take the body prepared for Him in order to accomplish it. The love, the devotedness to the glory of God, and the way in which He undertook to obey, are fully set forth. And this—the fruit of God's eternal counsels—displaces (by its very nature) every provisional sign: and contains, in itself alone, the condition of all relationship with God, and the means by which He glorifies Himself.100 The Word then assumes a body, in order to offer Himself as a sacrifice. Besides the revelation of this devotedness of the Word to accomplish the will of God, the effect of His sacrifice according to the will of God is also set before us.

He came to do the will of Jehovah. Now faith understands that it is by this will of God (that is, by His will who, according to His eternal wisdom, prepared a body for His Son) that those whom He has called unto Himself for salvation are set apart to God, in other words, are sanctified. It is by the will of God that we are set apart for Him (not by our own will), and that by means of the sacrifice offered to God.

We shall observe that the epistle does not here speak of the communication of life, or of a practical sanctification wrought by the Holy Ghost:101 the subject is the Person of Christ ascended on high, and the efficacy of His work. And this is important with regard to sanctification, because it shews that sanctification is a complete setting apart to God, as belonging to Him at the price of the offering of Jesus, a consecration to Him by means of that offering. God took the unclean Jews from among men and set them apart—consecrated them to Himself; so now the called ones, from that nation; and, thank God ourselves also, by means of the offering of Jesus.

But there is another element, already pointed out, in this offering, the force of which the epistle here applies to believers, namely, that the offering is “once for all.” It admits of no repetition. If we enjoy the effect of this offering, our sanctification is eternal in its nature. It does not fail. It is never repeated. We belong to God for ever according to the efficacy of this offering. Thus our sanctification, our being set apart to God, has—with regard to the work that accomplished it— all the stability of the will of God, and all the grace from which it sprang; it has, too, in its nature, the perfection of the work itself, by which it was accomplished, and the duration and the constant force of the efficacy of that work. But the effect of this offering is not limited to this setting apart for God. The point already treated contains our consecration by God Himself through the perfectly efficacious offering of Christ fulfilling His will. And now the position which Christ has taken, in consequence of His offering up of Himself, is employed in order clearly to demonstrate the state it has brought us into before God.

The priests among the Jews—for this contrast is still carried on—stood before the altar continually to repeat the same sacrifices which could never take away sins. But this Man, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down for ever102 at the right hand of God. There—having finished for His own all that regards their presentation without spot to God—He awaits the moment when His enemies shall be made His footstool, according to Psalm no: “Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” And the Spirit gives us the important reason so infinitely precious to us: “For he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

Here (v. 14) as in verse 12, on which the latter depends, the word “for ever “has the force of permanence—uninterrupted continuity. He is ever seated, we are ever perfected, by virtue of His work and according to the perfect righteousness in which, and conformably to which, He sits at the right hand of God upon His throne, according to that which He is personally there, His acceptance on God’s part being proved by His session at His right hand. And He is there for us.

It is a righteousness suited to the throne of God, yea, the righteousness of the throne. It neither varies nor fails. He is seated there for ever. If then we are sanctified—set apart to God—by this offering according to the will of God Himself, we are also made perfect for God by the same offering, as presented to Him in the Person of Jesus.

We have seen that this position has its origin in the will, the good-will of God (a will which combines the grace and the purpose of God), and that it has its foundation and present certainty in the accomplishment of the work

of Christ, the perfection of which is demonstrated by the session at the right hand of God of Him who accomplished it. But the testimony —for to enjoy this grace we must know it with divine certainty, and the greater it is, the more would our hearts be led to doubt it—the testimony upon which we believe it must be divine. And this it is. The Holy Ghost bears witness to us of it. The will of God is the source of the work; Christ, the Son of God, accomplished it; the Holy Ghost bears witness to us of it. And here the application to the people, called by grace and spared, is in consequence fully set forth, not merely the fulfilment of the work. The Holy Ghost bears us witness. “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

Blessed position! The certainty that God will never remember our sins and iniquities is founded on the steadfast will of God, on the perfect offering of Christ, now consequently seated at the right hand of God, and on the sure testimony of the Holy Ghost. It is a matter of faith that God will never remember our sins.

We may remark here the way in which the covenant is introduced; for although, as writing to “the holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,” he says, “a witness to us,” the form of his address is always that of an epistle to the Hebrews (believers, of course, but Hebrews, still bearing the character of God’s people). He does not speak of the covenant in a direct way, as a privilege in which Christians had a direct part. The Holy Ghost, he says, declares, “I will remember no more,” etc. It is this which he quotes. He only alludes to the new covenant, leaving it aside consequently as to all present application. For after having said, “This is the covenant,” etc., the testimony is cited as that of the Holy

Ghost, to prove the capital point which he was treating, that is, that God remembers our sins no more. But he alludes to the covenant (already known to the Jews as declared before of God) which gave the authority of the scriptures to this testimony, that God remembered no more the sins of His people who are sanctified and admitted into His favour, and which, at the same time, presented these two thoughts; first, that this complete pardon did not exist under the first covenant: and, second, that the door is left open for the blessing of the nation when the new covenant shall be formally established.

Another practical consequence is drawn: sins being remitted, there is no more oblation for sin. The one sacrifice having obtained remission, no others can be offered in order to obtain it. Remembrance of this one sacrifice there may indeed be, whatever its character; but a sacrifice to take away the sins which are already taken away, there cannot be. We are therefore in reality on entirely new ground—on that of the fact, that by the sacrifice of Christ our sins are altogether put away, and that for us, who are sanctified and partakers of the heavenly calling, a perfect and everlasting permanent cleansing has been made, remission granted, eternal redemption obtained. So that we are, in the eyes of God, without sin, on the ground of the perfection of the work of Christ, who is seated at His right hand, who has entered into the true holiest, into heaven itself, to sit there because His work is accomplished.

Thus all liberty is ours to enter into the holy place (all boldness) by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, that is His flesh, to admit us without spot into the presence of God Himself, who is there revealed. For us

the veil is rent, and that which rent the veil in order to admit us has likewise put away the sin which shut us out. We have also a great High Priest over the house of God, as we have seen, who represents us in the holy place.

On these truths are founded the exhortations that follow. One word before we enter on them, as to the relation that exists between perfect righteousness and the priesthood. There are many souls who use the priesthood as the means of obtaining pardon when they have failed. They go to Christ as a priest, that He may intercede for them and obtain the pardon which they desire, but for which they dare not ask God in a direct way. These souls—sincere as they are—have not liberty to enter into the holy place. They take refuge with Christ that they may afresh be brought into the presence of God. Their condition practically is that in which a pious Jew stood. They have lost, or rather they have never had by faith, the real consciousness of their position before God in virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. I do not speak here of all the privileges of the assembly: we have seen that the epistle does not speak of them. The position it makes for believers is this: those whom it addresses are not viewed as placed in heaven, although partakers of the heavenly calling; but a perfect redemption is accomplished, all guilt entirely put away for the people of God, who remembers their sins no more. The conscience is made perfect—they have no more conscience of sins—by virtue of the work accomplished once for all. There is no more question of sin; that is, of its imputation, of its being upon them before God, between them and God. There cannot be, because of the work accomplished upon the cross. The conscience

therefore is perfect; their Representative and High Priest is in heaven, a witness there to the work already accomplished for them.

Thus, although the epistle does not present them as in the holiest, as sitting there—like in the epistle to the Ephesians— they have full liberty, entire boldness, to enter into it. The question of imputation no longer exists. Their sins have been imputed to Christ. But He is now in heaven—a proof that the sins are blotted out for ever. Believers therefore enter with entire liberty into the presence of God Himself, and that always —having no more for ever any conscience of sins.

For what purpose then is priesthood? What is to be done with respect to the sins we commit? They interrupt our communion; but they make no change in our position before God, nor in the testimony rendered by the presence of Christ at the right hand of God. Nor do they raise any question as to imputation. They are sins against that position, or against God, measured by the relationship we are in to God, as in it. For sin is measured by the conscience according to our position. The perpetual presence of Christ at God's right hand has this twofold effect for us: first, perfected for ever we have no more conscience of sins before God, we are accepted; second, as priest He obtains grace to help in time of need, that we may not sin. But the present exercise of priesthood by Christ does not refer to sins: we have through His work no more conscience of sins, are perfected for ever. There is another truth connected with this, found in 1 John 2: we have an Advocate103 with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. On this our communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ is founded and secured. Our sins are not imputed,

for the propitiation is in all its value before God. But by sin communion is interrupted; our righteousness is not altered—for that is Christ Himself at God's right hand in virtue of His work; nor is grace changed, and "he is the propitiation for our sins"; but the heart has got away from God, communion is interrupted. But grace acts in virtue of perfect righteousness, and by the advocacy of Christ, on behalf of him who has failed; and his soul is restored to communion. Nor is it that we go to Jesus for this; He goes, even if we sin, to God for us. His presence there is the witness of an unchangeable righteousness which is ours; His intercession maintains us in the path we have to walk in, or as our Advocate He restores the communion which is founded on that righteousness. Our access to God is always open. Sin interrupts our enjoyment of it, the heart is not in communion; the advocacy of Jesus is the means of rousing the conscience by the action of the Spirit and the word, and we return (humbling ourselves) into the presence of God Himself. The priesthood and advocacy of Christ refer to the condition of an imperfect and feeble, or failing, creature upon earth, reconciling it with the perfectness of the place and glory in which divine righteousness sets us. The soul is maintained stedfast or restored.

Exhortations follow. Having the right thus to approach God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. This is the only thing that honours the efficacy of Christ's work, and the love which has thus brought us to enjoy God. In the words that follow, allusion is made to the consecration of the priests—a natural allusion, as drawing near to God in the holiest is the subject. They were sprinkled with blood and washed with water, and then they drew nigh to serve God. Still, although I doubt

not of the allusion to the priests, it is quite natural that baptism should have given rise to it. The anointing is not spoken of here—it is the power or privilege of the moral right to draw nigh.

Again, we may notice that, as to the foundation of the truth, this is the ground on which Israel will stand in the last days. In Christ in heaven will not be their place, nor the possession of the Holy Ghost as uniting the believer to Christ in heaven; but the blessing will be founded on water and on blood. God will remember their sins no more; and they will be washed in the clean water of the word.

The second exhortation is to persevere in the profession of the hope without wavering. He who made the promises is faithful.

Not only should we have this confidence in God for ourselves, but we are also to consider one another for mutual encouragement; and, at the same time, not to fail in the public and common profession of faith, pretending to maintain it, while avoiding the open identification of oneself with the Lord's people in the difficulties connected with the profession of this faith before the world. Besides, this public confession had a fresh motive in that the day drew nigh. We see that it is the judgment which is here presented as the thing looked for— in order that it may act on the conscience, and guard Christians from turning back to the world, and from the influence of the fear of man—rather than the Lord's coming to take up His own people. Verse 26 is connected with the preceding paragraph (23-25) the last words of which suggest the warning of verse 26; which is founded, moreover, on the doctrine of these two

chapters (9 and 10), with regard to the sacrifice. He insists on perseverance in a full confession of Christ, for His one sacrifice once offered was the only one. If any who had professed to know its value abandoned it, there was no other sacrifice to which he could have recourse, neither could it be ever repeated. There remained no more sacrifice for sin. All sins were pardoned by the efficacy of this sacrifice: but if, after having known the truth, they were to choose sin instead, there was no other sacrifice by virtue even of the perfection of that of Christ. Nothing but judgment remained. Such a professor, having had the knowledge of the truth and having abandoned it, would assume the character of an adversary.

The case, then, here supposed is the renunciation of the confession of Christ, deliberately preferring—after having known the truth—to walk according to one's own will in sin. This is evident, both from that which precedes and from verse 29.

Thus we have (chaps. 6 and 10) the two great privileges of Christianity, what distinguishes it from Judaism, presented in order to warn those who made profession of the former, that the renunciation of the truth, after enjoying these advantages, was fatal; for if these means of salvation were renounced, there was no other. These privileges were the manifested presence and power of the Holy Ghost, and the offering which, by its intrinsic and absolute value, left no place for any other. Both of these possessed a mighty efficacy, which, while it gave divine spring and force, and the manifestation of the presence of God on the one hand, made known on the other hand the eternal redemption and the perfection of the worshipper; leaving no means for repentance, if any

one abandoned the manifested and known power of that presence; no place for another sacrifice (which, moreover, would have denied the efficacy of the first), after the perfect work of God in salvation, perfect whether with regard to redemption, or to the presence of God by the Spirit in the midst of His own. Nothing remained but judgment.

They who despised the law of Moses died without mercy. What then would not those deserve at the hand of God, who trod under foot the Son of God, counted the blood of the covenant, by which they had been sanctified, as a common thing, and did despite to the Spirit of grace? It was not simple disobedience, however evil that might be; it was contempt of the grace of God, and of that which He had done, in the Person of Jesus, in order to deliver us from the consequences of disobedience. On the one hand, what was there left, if with the knowledge of what it was, they renounced this? On the other hand, how could they escape judgment? for they know a God who had said that vengeance belonged unto Him, and that He would recompense; and, again the Lord would judge His people.

Observe here the way in which sanctification is attributed to the blood; and, also, that professors are treated as belonging to the people. The blood, received by faith, consecrates the soul to God; but it is here viewed also as an outward means for setting apart the people as a people. Every individual who had owned Jesus to be the Messiah, and the blood to be the seal and foundation of an everlasting covenant available for eternal cleansing and redemption on the part of God, acknowledging himself to be set apart for God, by this means, as one of the people—every such individual

would, if he renounced it, renounce it as such: and there was no other way of sanctifying him. The former system had evidently lost its power for him, and the true one he had abandoned. This is the reason why it is said, “having received the knowledge of the truth.”

Nevertheless he hopes better things, for fruit, the sign of life, was there. He reminds them how much they had suffered for the truth, and that they had even received joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had a better and an abiding portion in heaven. They were not to cast away this confidence, the reward of which would be great. For in truth they needed patience, in order that, after having done the will of God, they might receive the effect of the promise. And He who is to come will come soon.

It is to this life of patience and perseverance that the chapter applies. But there is a principle which is the strength of this life, and which characterises it. In the midst of the difficulties of the christian walk, the just shall live by faith; and if anyone draws back, God will have no pleasure in him. “But,” says the author, placing himself as ever in the midst of the believers, “we are not of them who draw back, but of them that believe unto the saving of the soul.” Thereupon he describes the action of this faith, encouraging believers by the example of the elders who had acquired their renown by walking according to the same principle as that by which the faithful were now called to walk.

It is not a definition of this principle, that the epistle gives us at the commencement of chapter 11, but a declaration of its powers and action. Faith realises

(gives substance to) that which we hope for, and is a demonstration to the soul of that which we do not see.

There is much more order than is generally thought in the series given here of examples of the action of faith, although this order is not the principal object. I will point out its leading features.

With regard to creation. Lost in reasonings, and not knowing God, the human mind sought out endless solutions of existence. Those who have read the cosmogonies of the ancients know how many different systems, each more absurd than the other, have been invented for that which the introduction of God, by faith, renders perfectly simple. Modern science, with a less active and more practical mind, stops at second causes; and it is but little occupied with God. Geology has taken the place of the cosmogony of the Hindoos, Egyptians, Orientals and philosophers. To the believer the thought is clear and simple; his mind is assured and intelligent by faith. God, by His word, called all things into existence. The universe is not a producing cause; it is itself a creature acting by a law imposed upon it. It is One having authority who has spoken; His word has divine efficacy. He speaks, and the thing is. We feel that this is worthy of God; for, when once God is brought in, all is simple. Shut Him out, and man is lost in the efforts of his own imagination, which can neither create nor arrive at the knowledge of a Creator, because it only works with the power of a creature. Before, therefore, the details of the present form of creation are entered upon, the word simply says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Whatever may have taken place between that and chaos forms no part of revelation. It is distinct from the special action of the

deluge, which is made known to us. The beginning of Genesis does not give a history of the details of creation itself, nor the history of the universe. It gives the fact that in the beginning God created; and afterwards, the things that regard man on the earth. The angels even are not there. Of the stars it is only said, “He made the stars also”; when, we are not told. By faith then we believe that the worlds were created by the word of God.

But sin has come in, and righteousness has to be found for fallen man, in order that he may stand before God. God has given a Lamb for the sacrifice. But here we have set before us, not the gift on God’s part, but the soul drawing near to Him by faith.

By faith then Abel offers to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain—a sacrifice which (founded on the revelation already made by God) was offered in the intelligence which a conscience taught of God possessed, with regard to the position in which he who offered was standing. Death and judgment had come in by sin, to man insupportable, although he must undergo them. He must go therefore to God, confessing this; but he must go with a substitute which grace has given. He must go with blood, the witness at the same time both of the judgment and of the perfect grace of God. Doing this, he was in the truth, and this truth was righteousness and grace. He approaches God and puts the sacrifice between himself and God. He receives the testimony that he is righteous—righteous according to the righteous judgment of God. For the sacrifice was in connection with the righteousness that had condemned man, and owned too the perfect value of that which was done in it. The testimony is to his offering; but Abel is righteous before God. Nothing can be more clear, more

precious on this point. It is not only the sacrifice which is accepted, but Abel who comes with the sacrifice. He receives from God this testimony, that he is righteous. Sweet and blessed consolation! But the testimony is made to his gifts, so that he possessed all the certainty of acceptance according to the value of the sacrifice offered. In going to God by the sacrifice of Jesus, not only am I righteous (I receive the testimony that I am righteous), but this testimony is made to my offering; and therefore my righteousness has the value and the perfection of the offering; that is, of Christ offering Himself to God. The fact that we receive testimony on God's part that we are righteous, and at the same time that the testimony is made to the gift which we offer (not to the condition in which we are), is of infinite value to us. We are now before God according to the perfection of Christ's work. We walk with God thus.

By faith, death having been the means of my acceptance before God, all that belongs to the old man is abolished for faith; the power and the rights of death are entirely destroyed— Christ has undergone them. Thus, if it please God, we go to heaven without even passing through death (compare 2 Cor. 5:1-4). God did this for Enoch, for Elijah, as a testimony. Not only are sins put away, and righteousness established by the work of Christ, but the rights and power of him who has the power of death are entirely destroyed. Death may happen to us—we are by nature liable to it; but we possess a life which is outside its jurisdiction. Death, if it come, is but gain to us; and although nothing but the power of God Himself can raise or transform the body, this power has been manifested in Jesus, and has already wrought in us by quickening us (compare Eph.

1:19); and it works in us now in the power of deliverance from sin, from the law, and from the flesh. Death, as a power of the enemy, is conquered; it is become a “gain “to faith, instead of being a judgment on nature. Life, the power of God in life, works in holiness and in obedience here below, and declares itself in the resurrection, or in the transformation of the body. It is a witness of power with regard to Christ in Romans 1:4.

But there is another very sweet consideration to be noticed here. Enoch received testimony that he pleased God, before he was translated. This is very important and very precious. If we walk with God, we have the testimony that we please Him; we have the sweetness of communion with God, the testimony of His Spirit, His intercourse with us in the sense of His presence, the consciousness of walking according to His word, which we know to be approved by Him—in a word, a life which, spent with Him and before Him by faith, is spent in the light of His countenance, and in the enjoyment of the communications of His grace and of a sure testimony, coming from Himself, that we are pleasing to Him. A child who walks with a kind father and converses with him, his conscience reproaching him with nothing—does he not enjoy the sense of his parent’s favour?

In figure Enoch here represents the position of the saints who compose the assembly. He is taken up to heaven by virtue of a complete victory over death. By the exercise of sovereign grace he is outside the government and the ordinary deliverance of God. He bears testimony by the Spirit to the judgment of the world, but he does not go through it (Jude 14, 15). A walk like that of Enoch has God for its object; His existence is realised—the great business of life, which in

the world is spent as if man did everything—and the fact that He is interested in the walk of men, that He takes account of it, in order to reward those who diligently seek Him.

Noah is found in the scene of the government of this world. He does not warn others of the coming judgments as one who is outside them, although he is a preacher of righteousness. He is warned himself and for himself: he is in the circumstances to which the warning relates. It is the spirit of prophecy. He is moved by fear, and he builds an ark to the saving of his house. He thus condemned the world. Enoch had not to build an ark in order to pass safely through the flood. He was not in it: God translated him—exceptionally. Noah is preserved (heir of the righteousness which is by faith) for a future world. There is a general principle which accepts the testimony of God respecting the judgment that will fall upon men, and the means provided by God for escaping it: this belongs to every believer.

But there is something more precise. Abel has the testimony that he is righteous; Enoch walks with God, pleases God, and is exempted from the common lot of humanity, proclaiming as from above the fate that awaits men, and the coming of Him who will execute the judgment. He goes forward to the accomplishment of the counsels of God. But neither Abel nor Enoch, thus viewed, condemned the world as that in the midst of which they were journeying, receiving themselves the warning addressed to those who were dwellers therein. This was Noah’s case; the prophet, although delivered, is in the midst of the judged people. The assembly is outside them. Noah’s ark condemned the world; the testimony of God was enough for faith, and he inherits a

world that had been destroyed, and (what belongs to all believers) righteousness by faith, on which the new world too is founded. This is the case of the Jewish remnant in the last days. They pass through the judgments, out of which we, as not belonging to the world, have been taken. Warned themselves of God's way of government in the earth, they will be witnesses to the world of the coming judgments, and will be heirs of the righteousness which is by faith, and witnesses to it in a new world, wherein righteousness will be accomplished in judgment by Him who is come, and whose throne will uphold the world in which Noah himself failed. The words, "heir of the righteousness which is by faith," point out, I think, that this faith which had governed a few was summed up in his person, and that the whole unbelieving world was condemned. The witness of this faith before judgment, Noah passes through it: and when the world is renewed, he is a public witness to the blessing of God that rests on faith, although outwardly all is changed. Thus Enoch represents the saints of the present time; Noah, the Jewish remnant.104 The Spirit, after establishing the great fundamental principles of faith in action, goes on (v. 8) to produce examples of the divine life in detail, always in connection with Jewish knowledge, with that which the heart of a Hebrew could not fail to own; and, at the same time, in connection with the object of the epistle and with the wants of Christians among the Hebrews.

In the previous case we have seen a faith which, after owning a Creator-God, recognises the great principles of the relations of man with God, and that onwards to the end upon earth.

In that which follows, we have first the patience of faith when it does not possess, but trusts God and waits, assured of fulfilment. This is from verse 8 to 22. We may subdivide it thus:—first, the faith which takes the place of strangership on earth, and maintains it, because something better is desired; and which, in spite of weakness, finds the strength that is requisite in order to the fulfilment of the promises. This is from verses 8 to 16. Its effect is entrance into the joy of a heavenly hope. Strangers in the land of promise, and not enjoying the fulfilment of promises here below, they wait for more excellent things—things which God prepares on high for those who love Him. For such He has prepared a city. In unison with God in His own thoughts, their desires (through grace) answering to the things in which He takes delight, they are the objects of His peculiar regard. He is not ashamed to be called their God. Abraham not only followed God into a land that He shewed him, but, a stranger there, and not possessing the land of promise, he is, by the mighty grace of God, exalted to the sphere of His thoughts; and, enjoying communion with God and the communications of His grace, he rests upon God for the time present, accepts his position of strangership on earth, and, as the portion of his faith, waits for the heavenly city of which God is the builder and the founder. There was not, so to speak, an open revelation of what was the subject of this hope, as was the case with that by which Abraham was called of God; but walking closely enough with God to know that which was enjoyed in His presence, and being conscious that he had not received the fulfilment of the promise, he lays hold of the better things, and waits for them, although only seeing them afar off, and remains a

stranger upon earth, unmindful of the country whence he came out.

The special application of these first principles of faith to the case of the Hebrew Christians is evident. They are the normal life of faith for all.

The second character of faith presented in this part is entire confidence in the fulfilment of the promises—a confidence maintained in spite of all that might tend to destroy it. This is from verse 17 to 22.

We next find, the second great division, that faith makes its way through all the difficulties that oppose its progress (v. 23-27). And from verse 28 to 31 faith displays itself in a trust that reposes on God with regard to the use of the means which He sets before us, and of which nature cannot avail itself. Finally, there is the energy in general, of which faith is the source, and the sufferings that characterise the walk of faith.105 This general character belongs to all the examples mentioned, namely, that they who have exercised faith have not received the fulfilment of the promise; the application of which to the state of the Hebrew Christians is evident. Further, these illustrious heroes of faith, however honoured they might be among the Jews, did not enjoy the privileges that Christians possessed. God in His counsels had reserved something better for us.

Let us notice some details. Abraham’s faith shews itself by a thorough trust in God. Called to leave his own people, breaking the ties of nature, he obeys. He knows not whither he is going: enough for him that God would shew him the place. God, having brought him thither, gives him nothing. He dwells there content, in perfect

reliance on God. He was a gainer by it. He waited for a city that had foundations. He openly confesses that he is a stranger and a pilgrim on earth (Gen. 23:4). Thus, in spirit, he draws nearer to God. Although he possesses nothing, his affections are engaged. He desires a better country, and attaches himself to God more immediately and entirely. He has no desire to return into his own country; he seeks a country. Such is the Christian. In offering up Isaac there was that absolute confidence in God which, at His command, can renounce even God's own promises as possessed after the flesh, sure that God would restore them through the exercise of His power, overcoming death and every obstacle.

It is thus that Christ renounced His rights as Messiah, and went even into death, committing Himself to the will of God and trusting in Him; and received everything in resurrection. And this the Hebrew Christians had to do, with respect to the Messiah and the promises made to Israel. But, if there is simplicity of faith, for us the Jordan is dry, nor could we indeed have passed it if the Lord had not passed on before.

Observe here that, when trusting in God and giving up all for Him, we always gain, and we learn something more of the ways of His power: for in renouncing according to His will anything already received, we ought to expect from the power of God that He will bestow something else. Abraham renounces the promise after the flesh. He sees the city which has foundations; he can desire a heavenly country. He gives up Isaac, in whom were the promises: he learns resurrection, for God is infallibly faithful. The promises were in Isaac: therefore God must restore him to Abraham, and by resurrection, if he offered him in sacrifice.

In Isaac faith distinguishes between the portion of God's people according to His election, and that of man having birthrights according to nature. This is the knowledge of the ways of God in blessing, and in judgment.

By faith Jacob, a stranger and feeble, having nothing but the staff with which he had crossed the Jordan, worships God, and announces the double portion of the heir of Israel, of the one whom his brethren rejected—a type of the Lord, the heir of all things. This lays the ground of worship.

By faith Joseph, a stranger, the representative here of Israel far from his own country, reckons on the fulfilment of the earthly promises.106 These are the expressions of faith in the faithfulness of God, in the future fulfilment of His promise. In that which follows we have the faith which surmounts every difficulty that arises in the path of the man of God, in the way that God marks out for him as he journeys on towards the enjoyment of the promises.

The faith of the parents of Moses makes them disregard the king's cruel command, and they conceal their infant; whom God, in answer to their faith, preserved by extraordinary means when there was no other way to save it. Faith does not reason; it acts from its own point of view, and leaves the result to God.

But the means which God used for the preservation of Moses placed him within a little of the highest position in the kingdom. He there came to be possessed of all the acquirements which that period could bestow on a man distinguished alike by his energy and his character. But faith does its work, and inspires divine affections which do not look to surrounding circumstances for a guide of

action, even when those circumstances may have owned their origin to the most remarkable providences.

Faith has its own objects, supplied by God Himself, and governs the heart with a view to those objects. It gives us a place and relationships which rule the whole life, and leave no room for other motives and other spheres of affection which would divide the heart; for the motives and affections which govern faith are given by God, and given by Him in order to form and govern the heart.

Verses 24-26 develop this point. It is a very important principle; for we often hear Providence alleged as a reason for not walking by faith. Never was there a more remarkable Providence than that which placed Moses in the court of Pharaoh; and it gained its object. It would not have done so if Moses had not abandoned the position into which that Providence had brought him. But it was faith (that is to say, the divine affections which God had created in his heart), and not Providence as a rule and motive, which produced the effect for which Providence had preserved and prepared him. Providence (thanks be to God!) governs circumstances; faith governs the heart and the conduct.

The reward which God has promised comes in here as an avowed object in the sphere of faith. It is not the motive power; but it sustains and encourages the heart that is acting by faith, in view of the object which God presents to our affections. It thus takes the heart away from the present, from the influence of the things that surround us (whether they are things that attract or that tend to intimidate us), and elevates the heart and character of him who walks by faith, and confirms him in

a path of devotedness which will lead him to the end at which he aims.

A motive outside that which is present to us is the secret of stability and of true greatness. We may have an object with regard to which we act; but we need a motive outside that object—a divine motive—to enable us to act in a godly way respecting it.

Faith realises also (v. 27) the intervention of God without seeing Him; and thus delivers from all fear of the power of man—the enemy of His people. But the thought of God's intervention brings the heart into a greater difficulty than even the fear of man. If His people are to be delivered, God must intervene, and that in judgment. But they, as well as their enemies, are sinners; and the consciousness of sin and of deserving judgment necessarily destroys confidence in Him who is the Judge. Dare they see Him come to manifest His power in judgment (for this it is, in fact, which must take place for the deliverance of His people)? Is God for us—the heart asks—this God who is coming in judgment? But God has provided the means of securing safety in the presence of judgment (v. 28); a means apparently contemptible and useless, yet which in reality is the only one that, by glorifying Him with regard to the evil of which we are guilty, has power to afford shelter from the judgment which He executes.

Faith recognised the testimony of God by trusting to the efficacy of the blood sprinkled on the door, and could, in all security, let God come in judgment—God who, seeing the blood, would pass over His believing people. By faith Moses kept the passover. Observe here that, by the act of putting the blood on the door, the people

acknowledged that they were as much the objects of the just judgment of God as the Egyptians. God had given them that which preserved them from it; but it was because they were guilty and deserved it. No one can stand before God.

Verse 29. But the power of God is manifested, and manifested in judgment. Nature, the enemies of God's people, think to pass through this judgment dry-shod, like those who are sheltered by redeeming power from the righteous vengeance of God. But the judgment swallows them up in the very same place in which the people find deliverance—a principle of marvellous import. There, where the judgment of God is, even there is the deliverance. Believers have truly experienced this in Christ. The cross is death and judgment, the two terrible consequences of sin, the lot of sinful man. To us they are the deliverance provided of God. By and in them we are delivered, and (in Christ) we pass through and are out of their reach. Christ died and is risen; and faith brings us, by means of that which should have been our eternal ruin, into a place where death and judgment are left behind, and where our enemies can no longer reach us. We go through without their touching us. Death and judgment shield us from the enemy. They are our security. But we enter into a new sphere, we live by the effect not only of Christ's death, but of His resurrection.

Those who, in the mere power of nature, think to pass through (they who speak of death and judgment and Christ, taking the christian position, and thinking to pass through, although the power of God in redemption is not with them) are swallowed up.

With respect to the Jews, this event will have an earthly antitype; for in fact the day of God's judgment on earth will be the deliverance of Israel, who will have been brought to repentance.

This deliverance at the Red Sea goes beyond the protection of the blood in Egypt. There God coming in the expression of His holiness, executing judgment upon evil, what they needed was to be sheltered from that judgment—to be protected from the righteous judgment of God Himself. And, by the blood, God, thus coming to execute judgment, was shut out, and the people were placed in safety before the Judge. This judgment had the character of the eternal judgment. And God had the character of a Judge.

At the Red Sea it was not merely deliverance from judgment hanging over them; God was for the people, active in love and in power for them.107 The deliverance was an actual deliverance: they came out of that condition in which they had been enslaved, God's own power bringing them unhurt through that which otherwise must have been their destruction. Thus, in our case, it is Christ's death and resurrection, in which we participate, the redemption which He therein accomplished,108 which introduces us into an entirely new condition altogether outside that of nature. We are no longer in the flesh.

In principle the earthly deliverance of the Jewish nation (the Jewish remnant) will be the same. Founded on the power of the risen Christ, and on the propitiation wrought out by His death, that deliverance will be accomplished by God, who will intervene on behalf of those that turn to Him by faith: at the same time that

His adversaries (who are those also of His people) shall be destroyed by the very judgment which is the safeguard of the people whom they have oppressed.

Verse 30. Yet all difficulties were not overcome because redemption was accomplished, deliverance effected. But the God of deliverance was with them; difficulties disappear before Him. That which is a difficulty to man is none to Him. Faith trusts in Him, and uses means which only serve to express that trust. The walls of Jericho fall down at the sound of trumpets made of rams' horns, after Israel had compassed the city seven days, sounding these trumpets seven times.

Rahab, in presence of all the as yet unimpaired strength of the enemies of God and His people, identifies herself with the latter before they had gained one victory, because she felt that God was with them. A stranger to them (as to the flesh), she by faith escaped the judgment which God executed upon her people.

Verse 32. Details are now no longer entered into. Israel (although individuals had still to act by faith), being established in the land of promise, furnished less occasion to develop examples of the principles on which faith acted. The Spirit speaks in a general way of these examples in which faith reappeared under various characters and energy of patience, and sustained souls under all kinds of suffering. Their glory was with God, the world was not worthy of them. Nevertheless they had received nothing of the fulfilment of the promises; they had to live by faith, as well as the Hebrews, to whom the epistle was addressed. The latter, however, had privileges which were in no wise possessed by believers of former days. Neither the one nor the other

was brought to perfection, that is, to the heavenly glory, unto which God has called us, and in which they are to participate. Abraham and others waited for this glory; they never possessed it: God would not give it them without us. But He has not called us by the same revelations only as those which He made to them. For the days of the rejected Messiah He had reserved some better thing. Heavenly things have become things of the present time, things fully revealed and actually possessed in spirit, by the union of the saints with Christ, and present access into the holiest through the blood of Christ.

We have not to do with a promise and a distinct view of a place approached from without, entrance to which was not yet granted, so that relationship with God would not be founded on entrance within the veil—entrance into His own presence. We now go in with boldness. We belong to heaven; our citizenship is there; we are at home there. Heavenly glory is our present portion, Christ having gone in as our Forerunner. We have in heaven a Christ who is man glorified. This Abraham had not. He walked on earth with a heavenly mind, waiting for a city, feeling that nothing else would satisfy the desires which God had awakened in his heart; but he could not be connected with heaven by means of a Christ actually sitting there in glory. This is our present portion. We can even say that we are united to Him there. The Christian’s position is quite different from that of Abraham. God had reserved some better thing for us.

The Spirit does not here develop the whole extent of this “better thing,” because the assembly is not His subject. He presents the general thought to the Hebrews to

encourage them, that believers of the present day have special privileges, which they enjoy by faith, but which did not belong even to the faith of believers in former days.

We shall be perfected, that is to say, glorified together in resurrection; but there is a special portion which belongs to the saints now, and which did not belong to the patriarchs. The fact that Christ, as man, is in heaven after having accomplished redemption, and that the Holy Ghost, by whom we are united to Christ, is on earth, made this superiority granted to Christians easily understood. Accordingly even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than the greatest of those who preceded it. {Heb 12}

Chapter 12. The epistle now enters on the practical exhortations that flow from its doctrinal instruction, with reference to the dangers peculiar to the Hebrew Christians—instruction suited throughout to inspire them with courage. Surrounded with a cloud of witnesses like these of chapter 11, who all declared the advantages of a life of faith in promises still unfulfilled, they ought to feel themselves impelled to follow their steps, running with patience the race set before them, and above all looking away from every difficulty109 to Jesus, who had run the whole career of faith, sustained by the joy that was set before Him, and, having reached the goal, had taken His seat in glory at the right hand of God.

This passage presents the Lord, not as He who bestows faith, but as He who has Himself run the whole career of faith. Others had travelled a part of the road, had surmounted some difficulties; the obedience and the

perseverance of the Lord had been subjected to every trial of which human nature is susceptible. Men, the adversary, the being forsaken of God, everything was against Him. His disciples flee when He is in danger, His intimate friend betrays Him; He looks for some one to have compassion on Him and finds no one. The fathers (of whom we read in the previous chapter) trusted in God and were delivered, but as for Jesus, He was a worm, and no man; His throat was dry with crying. His love for us,. His obedience to His Father, surmounted all. He carries off the victory by submission, and takes His seat in a glory exalted in proportion to the greatness of His abasement and obedience, the only just reward for having perfectly glorified God where He had been dishonoured by sin. The joy and the rewards that are set before us are never the motives of the walk of faith— we know this well with regard to Christ, but it is not the less true in our own case—they are the encouragement of those who walk in it.

Jesus, then, who has attained the glory due to Him, becomes an example to us in the sufferings through which He passed in attaining it; therefore we are neither to lose courage nor to grow weary. We have not yet, like Him, lost our lives in order to glorify God and to serve Him. The way in which the apostle engages them to disentangle themselves from every hindrance, whether sin or difficulty, is remarkable; as though they had nothing to do but to cast them off as useless weights. And in fact, when we look at Jesus, nothing is easier; when we are not looking at Him, nothing more impossible.

There are two things to be cast off: every weight, and the sin that would entangle our feet (for he speaks of

one who is running in the race). The flesh, the human heart, is occupied with cares and difficulties; and the more we think of them, the more we are burdened by them. It is enticed by the object of its desires, it does not free itself from them. The conflict is with a heart that loves the thing against which we strive; we do not separate ourselves from it in thought. When looking at Jesus, the new man is active; there is a new object, which unburdens and detaches us from every other by means of a new affection which has its place in a new nature: and in Jesus Himself, to whom we look, there is a positive power which sets us free.

It is by casting it all off in an absolute way that the thing is easy—by looking at that which fills the heart with other things, and occupies it in a different sphere, where a new object and a new nature act upon each other; and in that object there is a positive power which absorbs the heart and shuts out all objects that act merely on the old nature. What is felt to be a weight is easily cast off. Everything is judged of by its bearing on the object we aim at. If I run in a race and all my thought is the prize, a bag of gold is readily cast away. It is a weight. But we must look to Jesus. Only in Him can we cast off every hindrance easily and without reservation. We cannot combat sin by the flesh.

But there is another class of trials that come from without: they are not to be cast off, they must be borne. Christ, as we have seen, went through them. We have not like Him resisted even to the shedding of our blood rather than fail in faithfulness and obedience. Now God acts in these trials as a father; He chastises us. They come perhaps, as in the case of Job, from the enemy, but the hand and the wisdom of God are in them. He

chastises those whom He loves. We must therefore neither despise the chastisement nor be discouraged by it. We must not despise it, for He does not chastise without a motive or a cause (moreover, it is God who does it); nor must we be discouraged, for He does it in love.

If we lose our life for the testimony of the Lord and in resisting sin, the warfare is ended; and this is not chastisement, but the glory of suffering with Christ. Death in this case is the negation of sin. He who has died is free from sin; he who has suffered in the flesh has done with sin. But up to that point, the flesh in practice (for we have a right to reckon ourselves dead) is not yet destroyed; and God knows how to unite the manifestation of the faithfulness of the new man who suffers for the Lord, with the discipline by which the flesh is mortified. For example, Paul's thorn in the flesh united these two things. It was painful to him in the exercise of his ministry, for it was something that tended to make him contemptible when preaching (and this he endured for the Lord's sake), but at the same time it kept his flesh in check.

Verse 9. Now we are subject to our natural parents, who discipline us after their own will: how much more then to the Father of spirits,110 who makes us partakers of His own holiness! Observe here the grace that is appealed to. We have seen how much the Hebrews needed warning—their tendency was to fail in the career of faith. The means of preventing this is doubtless not to spare warning, but yet to bring the soul fully into connection with grace. This alone can give strength and courage through confidence in God.

We are not come to Mount Sinai, to the law which makes demands on us, but to Sion, where God manifested His power in re-establishing Israel by His grace in the person of the elect king, when, as to the responsibility of the people, all was entirely lost, all relationship with God impossible on that footing, for the ark was lost; there was no longer a mercy-seat, no longer a throne of God among the people. Ichabod was written on Israel.

Therefore in speaking of holiness he says, God is active in love towards you, even in your very sufferings. It is He who has not only given free access to Himself, by the blood and by the presence of Christ in heaven for us, but who is continually occupied with all the details of your life; whose hand is in all your trials, who thinks unceasingly about you, in order to make you partakers of His holiness. This is not to require holiness on our part—necessary as it must ever be—it is in order to make us partakers of His own holiness. What immense and perfect grace! What a means! It is the means by which to enjoy God Himself perfectly.

Verse n. God does not expect us to find these exercises of soul pleasant at the moment (they would not produce their effect if they were so): but afterwards, the will being broken, they produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The pride of man is brought down when he is obliged to submit to that which is contrary to his will. God also takes a larger (ever precious) place in his thoughts and in his life.

Verse 12. On the principle then of grace, the Hebrews are exhorted to encourage themselves in the path of faith, and to watch against the buddings of sin among them, whether in yielding to the desires of the flesh, or

in giving up christian privileges for something of the world. They were to walk so courageously that their evident joy and blessing (which is always a distinct testimony and on that triumphs over the enemy) should make the weak feel that it was their own assured portion also; and thus strength and healing would be administered to them instead of discouragement. The path of godliness as to circumstances was to be made easy, a beaten path to weak and lame souls; and they would feel more than stronger souls the comfort and value of such a path.

Grace, we have already said, is the motive given for this walk; but grace is here presented in a form that requires to be considered a little in detail.

We are not come, it says, to Mount Sinai. There the terrors of the majesty of God kept man at a distance. No one was to approach Him. Even Moses feared and trembled at the presence of Jehovah. This is not where the Christian is brought. But, in contrast with such relationships as these with God, the whole millennial state in all its parts is developed; according however to the way in which these different parts are now known as things hoped for. We belong to it all; but evidently these things are not yet established. Let us name them: Sion; the heavenly Jerusalem; the angels and general assembly; the church of the firstborn, whose names are inscribed in heaven; God the Judge of all; the spirits of the just made perfect; Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant; and finally, the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Sion we have spoken of as a principle. It is the intervention of sovereign grace (in the king) after the

ruin, and in the midst of the ruin, of Israel, re-establishing the people according to the counsels of God in glory, and their relationships with God Himself. It is the rest of God on the earth, the seat of the Messiah's royal power. But, as we know, the extent of the earth is far from being the limits of the Lord's inheritance. Sion on earth is Jehovah's rest; it is not the city of the living God—the heavenly Jerusalem is that, the heavenly capital, so to speak, of His kingdom, the city that has foundations, whose founder and builder is God Himself.

Having named Sion below, the author turns naturally to Jerusalem above, but this carries him into heaven, and he finds himself with all the people of God, in the midst of a multitude of angels, the great universal assembly111 of the invisible world. There is however one peculiar object on which his eye rests in this marvellous and heavenly scene. It is the assembly of the firstborn whose names are inscribed in heaven. They were not born there, not indigenous like the angels, whom God preserved from falling. They are the objects of the counsels of God. It is not merely that they reach heaven: they are the glorious heirs and firstborn of God, according to His eternal counsels, in accordance with which they are registered in heaven. The assembly composed of the objects of grace, now called in Christ, belongs to heaven by grace. They are not the objects of the promises, who, not having received the fulfilment of the promises on earth, do not fail to enjoy them in heaven. They have the anticipation of no other country or citizenship than heaven. The promises were not addressed to them. They have no place on earth. Heaven is prepared for them by God Himself. Their names are inscribed there by Him. It is the highest place in heaven

above the dealings of God in government, promise, and law on the earth. This leads the picture of glory on to God Himself. But (having reached the highest point, that which is most excellent in grace) He is seen under another character, namely, as the Judge of alt as looking down from on high to judge all that is below. This introduces another class of these blessed inhabitants of the heavenly glory: those whom the righteous Judge owned as His before the heavenly assembly was revealed, the spirits of the just arrived at perfection. They had finished their course, they had overcome in conflict, they were waiting only for glory. They had been connected with the dealings of God on the earth, but—faithful before the time for its blessing was come—they had their rest and their portion in heaven.

It was the purpose of God nevertheless to bless the earth. He could not do so according to man's responsibility: His people even were but as grass. He would therefore establish a new covenant with Israel, a covenant of pardon, and according to which He would write the law in the hearts of His people. The Mediator of this covenant had already appeared and had done all that was required for its establishment. The saints among the Hebrews were come to the Mediator of the new covenant: blessing was thus prepared for the earth and secured to it.

Finally, the blood of Christ had been shed on earth, as that of Abel by Cain; but, instead of crying from the earth for vengeance, so that Cain became a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth (a striking type of the Jew, guilty of the death of Christ), it is grace that speaks; and the shed blood cries to obtain pardon and peace for those who shed it.

It will be observed that, although speaking of the different parts of millennial blessing, with its foundations, all is given according to the present condition of things, before the coming of that time of blessing from God. We are in it as to our relationships; but the spirits of the just men of the Old Testament only are here spoken of, and only the Mediator of this new covenant: the covenant itself is not established. The blood cries, but the answer in earthly blessing has not yet come. This is easily understood. It is exactly according to the existing state of things, and even throws considerable light on the position of the Hebrew Christians and on the doctrine of the epistle. The important thing for them was, that they should not turn away from Him who spoke from heaven. It was with Him they had to do. We have seen them connected with all that went before, with the Lord's testimony on earth; but in fact they had to do at that time with the Lord Himself as speaking from heaven. His voice then shook the earth; but now, speaking with the authority of grace and from heaven, He announced the dissolution of everything which the flesh could lean upon, or on which the creature could rest its hopes.

All that could be shaken should be dissolved. How much more fatal to turn away from Him that speaketh now, than from the commandments even of Sinai! This shaking of all things (whether here or in the analogous passage in 2 Peter) evidently goes beyond Judaism, but has a peculiar application to it. Judaism was the system and the frame of the relationships of God with men on earth according to the principle of responsibility on their part. All this was of the first creation, but its springs were poisoned; heaven, the seat of the enemy's power,

perverted and corrupted; the heart of man on earth was corrupt and rebellious. God will shake and change all things. The result will be a new creation in which righteousness shall dwell.

Meanwhile the first fruits of this new creation were being formed; and in Christianity God was forming the heavenly part of the kingdom that cannot be moved; and Judaism—the centre of the earthly system and of human responsibility—was passing away. The apostle therefore announces the shaking of all things—that everything which exists as the present creation shall be set aside. With regard to the present fact he says only, “we receive a kingdom that cannot be moved”; and calls us to serve God with true piety, because our God is a consuming fire; not—as people say—God out of Christ, but our God. This is His character in holy majesty and in righteous judgment of evil.

Chapter 13. In this next chapter there is more than one truth important to notice. The exhortations are as simple as they are weighty, and require but few remarks. They rest in the sphere in which the whole of the epistle does: what relates to the Christian’s path as walking here, not what flows from union with Christ in heavenly places. Brotherly love, hospitality, care for those in bonds, the strict maintenance of the marriage tie and personal purity, the avoiding of covetousness: such are the subjects of exhortation, all important and connected with the gracious walk of a Christian, but not drawn from the higher and more heavenly sources and principles of the christian life as we see in Ephesians and Colossians. Nor, even though there be more analogy —for the epistle to the Romans rests in general in life in Christ in this world, presenting Christ’s resurrection,

without going on to His ascension112— are the exhortations such as in this latter epistle. Those which follow connect themselves with the circumstances in which the Hebrews found themselves, and rest on the approaching abolition and judgment of Judaism, from which they had now definitely to separate themselves.

In exhorting them (v. 7) to remember those who have guided the flock, he speaks of those already departed in contrast with those still living (v. 17). The issue of their faith might well encourage others to follow their steps, to walk by those principles of faith which had led them to so noble a result.

Moreover Christ never changed; He was the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Let them abide in the simplicity and integrity of faith. Nothing is a plainer proof that the heart is not practically in possessing of that which gives rest in Christ, that it does not realise what Christ is, than the restless search after something new—“divers and strange doctrines.” To grow in the knowledge of Christ is our life and our privilege. The search after novelties which are foreign to Him, is a proof of not being satisfied with Him. But He who is not satisfied with Jesus does not know Him, or, at least, has forgotten Him. It is impossible to enjoy Him, and not to feel that He is everything, that is to say, that He satisfies us, and that by the nature of what He is, He shuts out everything else.

Now with regard to Judaism, in which the Hebrews were naturally inclined to seek satisfaction for the flesh, the apostle goes farther. They were no longer Jews in the possession of the true worship of God, a privileged worship in which others had no right to participate. The

altar of God belonged now to the Christians. Christians only had a right to it. An earthly worship, in which there was no entering within the veil, into God's own presence in the sanctuary, could no longer subsist—a worship that had its worldly glory, that belonged to the elements of this world and had its place there. Now, it is either heaven, or the cross and shame. The great sacrifice for sin has been offered; but by its efficacy, it brings us into the sanctuary, into heaven itself, where the blood has been carried in; and on the other hand it takes us outside the camp, a religious people connected with the world down here, into shame and rejection on earth. This is the portion of Christ. In heaven He is accepted. He has gone in with His own blood— on earth cast out and despised.

A worldly religion, which forms a system in which the world can walk, and in which the religious element is adapted to man on the earth, is the denial of Christianity.

Here we have no continuing city, we seek the one which is to come. By Christ we offer our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. By sharing also our goods with others, by doing good in every way, we offer sacrifices with which God is well pleased (v. 16).

He then exhorts them to obey those who, as responsible to God, watch over souls, and who go before the saints in order to lead them on. It is a proof of that humble spirit of grace which seeks only to please the Lord.

The sense of this responsibility makes Paul ask the saints to pray for him, but with the declaration that he had assuredly a good conscience. We serve God, we act for Him, when He is not obliged to be acting on us. That

is to say, the Spirit of God acts by our means when He has not to occupy us with ourselves. When the latter is the case, one could not ask for the prayers of saints as a labourer. While the Spirit is exercising us in our conscience, we cannot call ourselves labourers of God. When the conscience is good, we can ask unreservedly for the prayers of the saints. The apostle so much the more asked for them because he hoped thus the sooner to see them again.

Finally, he invokes blessing upon them, giving God the title he so often ascribes to Him—"the God of peace." In the midst of exercise of heart with regard to the Hebrews, of arguments to preserve their love from growing cold, in the midst of the moral unsteadiness that enfeebled the walk of these Christians, and their trials in the breaking down of what they considered stable and holy, this title has a peculiarly precious character.

The Spirit sets them also in the presence of a risen Christ, of a God who had founded and secured peace by the death of Christ, and had given a proof of it in His resurrection. He had brought Christ again from the dead according to the power of the blood of the everlasting113 covenant. On this blood the believing people might build a hope that nothing could shake. For it was not, as at Sinai, promises founded on the condition of the people's obedience, but on the ransom which had been paid, and the perfect expiation of their disobedience. The blessing was therefore unchangeable, the covenant (as the inheritance and the redemption) was everlasting. He prays that the God who had wrought it, would work in them to grant them full power and energy for the accomplishment of His will, working

Himself in them that which was well-pleasing in His sight.

He urges them to give heed to exhortation; he had only sent them a few words.

He who wrote the letter desires they should know that Timothy had been set at liberty; he himself was so already; he was in Italy; circumstances which tend to confirm the idea that it was Paul who wrote this letter—a very interesting point, although in nowise affecting its authority.

It is the Spirit of God who everywhere gives His own authority to the word.

73 It will be found, I think, that in Hebrews the exercise of the heavenly priesthood is not applied to the case of a fall into sin. It is for mercy and grace to help in time of need. Its subject is access to God, having the High Priest on high; and this we always have. The conscience is always perfect (chaps. 9 and 10) as to imputation and thus going to God.

74 He sanctifies the people with His own blood. They count the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing. There is no inward sanctifying operation of the Spirit spoken of in Hebrews, though there are exhortations to the pursuit of holiness.

75 We shall see that, while shewing at the outset that the Subject of his discourse had seated Himself at the right hand of God, he speaks also of the communications of the Lord when on earth. But even here it is in contrast with Moses and the angels, as far more excellent. All has in view the deliverance of the believing Jews from Judaism.

76 A particular interpretation has, by some, been given to the word translated “worlds “; but it is certain that the word is used by the LXX (that is, in the Hellenistic or scriptural Greek) for the physical worlds.

77 The Greek verb has here a peculiar form, which gives it a reflective sense, causing the thing done to return into the doer, throwing back the glory of the thing done upon the one who did it.

78 See Psalm 68:17; Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19.

79 The words translated, “Thou art the same “(Atta Hu) are by many learned Hebraists taken—at least Hu—as a name of God. At any rate, as unchangeably the same, it amounts to it. The not failing years are endless duration when become a man.

80 Compare the answer of Christ to Nathanael at the end of John 1; also Matthew 17 and Luke 9, where the disciples are forbidden to announce Him as the Christ, and He declares He is about to suffer as Son of man, but shews them the coming glory.

81 This however in relationship with God. They did not represent nor make known the Father as He did. Also, while we are brought into the same glory with Christ and the same relationship with the Father, the personal glory of Christ as Son is always carefully secured. It has been justly remarked to the same purpose by another, that He never says “our “Father with the disciples. He tells them to say “our,” but says “my and your,” and it is much more precious.

82 Four distinct grounds may be noticed in the chapter for the humiliation of Jesus: it became God—there was His glory; the destruction of Satan’s power;

reconciliation or really propitiation by His death; and capacity for sympathy in priesthood.

83 The connection between the word addressed to man and God Himself is very remarkable here.

84 The sonship of Christ however, here below, cannot be separated from His eternal sonship, for this lends its character to the relationship in which He stands as Son on earth in time. The passage in the text refers to verses 5 and 8, compared with 6 and 10 of chapter 5. Compare also the beginning of John 17.

85 I do not think “afresh “ought to be inserted: the emphasis is on doing it for himself.

86 So in Matthew 13 some with joy receive it, but there was no root.

87 We have also, at the end of the epistle, the expression “the blood of the everlasting covenant.” “Covenant” he uses, I doubt not (as the word “law “also is used), because it was commonly employed as the condition of relationship with God, and “eternal” is characteristic of the Hebrews. There have been, and will be, covenants in time and for the earth; but we have eternal conditions of relationship with God, of which the blood of Christ is the expression and security, founded in everlasting grace, and righteousness as well as grace, by that precious blood, in which all the character and all the purpose of God has been made good and glorified, as well as our sins been put away.

88 The reader will remark how anxiously, so to speak, the epistle here attaches the epithet “eternal” to everything. It was not a temporary or earthly ground of relationship with God, but an eternal one; so of

redemption; so of inheritance. Corresponding to this, as to the work on earth, it is once for all. It is not unimportant to notice this as to the nature of the work. Hence the epithet attached even to the Spirit.

89 For in Christ we are the righteousness of God. His blood cleanses us on God's part. Jesus wrought out the purification of sins by Himself, and glorified God in so doing.

90 It is all-important thoroughly to understand, that it is into the presence of God that we enter; and that, at all times, and by virtue of a sacrifice and of blood which never lose their value. The worshipper, under the former tabernacle, did not come into the presence of God; he stayed outside the unrent veil. He sinned—a sacrifice was offered: he sinned again—a sacrifice was offered. Now the veil is rent. We are always in the presence of God without a veil. Happen what may, He always sees us —sees us in His presence—according to the efficacy of Christ's perfect sacrifice. We are there nowy by virtue of a perfect sacrifice^ offered for the putting away of sin, according to the divine glory, and which has perfectly accomplished the purification of sins. I should not be in the presence of God in the sanctuary, if I had not been purified according to the purity of God, and by God. It was this which brought me there. And this sacrifice and this blood can never lose their value. Through them I am therefore perfect for ever in the presence of God; I was brought into it by them.

91 The work in virtue of which all sin is finally put away out of God's sight—abolished—is accomplished, the question of good and evil is come to a final issue on the cross, and God perfectly glorified when sin was before

Him; the result will not be finally accomplished till the new heavens and the new earth. But our sins having been borne by Christ on the cross, He rises, atonement being made, an eternal testimony that they are gone for ever, and that by faith we are now justified and have peace. We must not confound these two things, our sins being put away, and the perfectly glorifying God in respect of sin, when Christ was made sin, the results of which are not yet accomplished. As regards the sinful nature, it is still in us; but Christ having died, its condemnation took place then, but, that being in death, we reckon ourselves dead to it, and no condemnation for us.

92 Some think that these two verses are not a parenthesis speaking of a testament, but a continuation of the argument on the covenant, taking the Greek word to mean, not the testator, but the sacrifice, which put a seal, more solemn than an oath, on the obligation of observing the covenant. It is a very delicate Greek question, on which I do not here enter. But I cannot say they have convinced me.

93 And He must have repeatedly suffered, for there must be reality in putting away sin.

94 The more we examine the cross from God’s side of it, the more we shall see this: man’s enmity against God, and against God come in goodness, was absolutely displayed; Satan’s power in evil over man too; man’s perfectness in love to the Father and obedience to Him; God’s majesty and righteousness against sin, and love to sinners, all He is; all good and evil perfectly brought to an issue, and that in the place of sin, that is, in Christ made sin for us. When sin was as such before His face in

the sinless One where it was needed and God perfectly glorified, and indeed the Son of man too, morally the whole thing was settled, and we know it: the actual results are not yet produced.

95 The judgment, which will fall upon the wicked, is not sin. Much more also is involved in the work and position of Christ, even heavenly glory with God: but it is not our subject here.

96 It is of moment to see the difference between verses 26 and 28. Sin had to be put away abstractedly out of God's sight, and hence He had to be perfectly glorified in respect of it, in that place where sin was before Him. Christ was made sin—appeared to abolish it out of God's sight. Besides this, our sins (guilt) were in question, and Christ bore them in His own body on the tree. The sins are borne, and Christ has them no more. They are gone as guilt before God for ever. The work for the abolition of sin in God's sight is done, and God owns it as done, having glorified Jesus who has glorified Him as to it when made sin. So that for God the thing is settled, and faith recognises this, but the result is not produced. The work is before God in all its value, but the sin still exists in the believer and in the world. Faith owns both, knows that in God's sight it is done, and rests as God does in it, but the believer knows that sin is still, de facto, there and in him: only he has a title to reckon himself dead to it—that sin in the flesh is condemned, but in the sacrifice for sin, so that there is none for him. The putting away is not accomplished, but what does it is; so that God recognises it, and so does faith, and stands perfectly clear before God as to sin and sins. He that is dead (and we are, as having died with Christ) is justified from sin. Our sins have all been borne. The difficulty partly arises

from “sin “being used for a particular act, and also abstractedly. In the word “sins “there is no such ambiguity. A sacrifice for sin may apply to a particular fault. Sin entered into the world is another idea. This ambiguity has produced the confusion.

97 The word “many “has a double bearing here, negative and positive. It could not be said “all,’ or all would be saved. On the other hand the word many generalises the work, so that it is not the Jews only who are its object.

98 It is not the same word as to “bore,” or thrust through, in Exodus 21 nor as “open “in Isaiah 50. The one (digged) is to prepare for obedience, the other would be to bind to it for ever, and to subject to the obedience when due. Exodus 21 intimates the blessed truth that, when He had fulfilled His personal service on earth, He would not abandon either His assembly or His people. He is ever God, but ever man, the humbled man, the glorified and reigning man, the subject man, in the joy of eternal perfection.

99 As throughout the epistle, the Messiah is the subject. In the psalm it is the Messiah who speaks, that is, the Anointed here below. He expresses His patience and faithfulness in the position which He had taken, addressing Jehovah as His God; and He tells us that He took this place willingly, according to the eternal counsels respecting His own Person. For the Person is not changed. But He speaks in the psalm according to the position of obedience which He had taken, saying always, / and mesin speaking of what took place before His incarnation.

100 Remark, also, here not only the substitution of the reality for the ceremonial figures of the law, but the difference of principle. The law required for righteousness that man should do the will of God, and rightly. That was human righteousness. Here Christ undertakes to do it, and has accomplished it in the offering up of Himself. His so doing the will of God is the basis of our relationship with God, and it is done, and we are accepted. As born of God our delight is to do God's will, but it is in love and newness of nature, not in order to be accepted.

101 It speaks of this last in the exhortations, chapter 12:14. But in the doctrine of the epistle, "sanctification "is not used in the practical sense of what is wrought in us.

102 The word translated here "for ever "is not the same word that is used for eternally. It has the sense of continuously, without interruption. He does not rise up or stand. He is ever seated, His work being finished. He will indeed rise up at the end to come and fetch us, and to judge the world, even as this same passage tells us.

103 There is a difference in detail here; but it does not affect my present subject. The High Priest has to do with our access to God; the Advocate with our communion with the Father and His government of us as children. The epistle to the Hebrews treats of the ground of access and shews us to be perfected for ever; and the priestly intercession does not apply to sins in that respect. It brings mercy and grace to help in time of need here, but we are perfected for ever before God. But communion is necessarily interrupted by the least sin or idle thought —yea, really had been, practically if not

judicially, before the idle thought was there. Here the advocacy of John comes in: “If any man sin,” and the soul is restored. But there is never imputation to the believer.

104 Indeed all that are spared for the world to come. Their state is expressed in the end of Revelation 7, as that of the Jews in the first verses of chapter 14.

105 In general we may say that verses 8-22 are faith resting assured on the promise, the patience of faith: verse 23 to the end, faith resting on God for the activities and difficulties faith leads to, the energy of faith.

106 Observe that in these cases we find the rights of Christ in resurrection; the judgment of nature, and the blessing of faith, through grace; the inheritance of all things heavenly and earthly by Christ; and Israel’s future return to their own land.

107 Stand still, says Moses, and see the salvation of Jehovah.

108 Crossing the Jordan represents the believer being set at liberty, and intelligently entering by faith into the heavenlies; it is conscious death and resurrection with Christ. The Red Sea is the power of redemption by Christ.

109 It is not insensibility to them, but, when they are felt to be there, looking from them to Christ. This is the secret of faith. “Be careful for nothing “need not have been said, if nothing had been there calculated to awaken care. Abraham considered not his body now dead.

110 “Father of spirits “is simply in contrast with “fathers of our flesh.”

111 The word here translated “assembly “was that of all the states of Greece; that of the “firstborn “is the word for the assembly of citizens of any particular state.

112 It is only spoken of in chapter 8:34, and an allusion in chapter 10:6.

113 The word “everlasting “is specific, in the epistle to the Hebrews, in contrast with a system which was passing away. It speaks of eternal redemption, eternal inheritance, the eternal Spirit even.

James

The epistle of James is not addressed to the assembly, and does not take the ground of apostolic authority over the persons to whom it is sent. It is a practical exhortation which still recognises the twelve tribes and the connection of the christian Jews with them, as Jonah addressed the Gentiles, although the Jewish people had their place before God. Thus the Spirit of God still acknowledges here the relationship with Israel, as in the other case the relationship with Gentiles, and the rights of God which are unchangeable, whatever may be the special privileges granted to the assembly or to Israel respectively. We know that historically the christian Jews remained Jews to the end of the New Testament history, and were even zealous for the law—to us a strange thing, but which God endured for a time.

The doctrine of Christianity is not the subject of this epistle. It gives God His place in the conscience, and with regard to all that surrounds us. It thus girds up the loins of the Christian, presenting also the near coming of the Lord and His present discipline—a discipline with respect to which the assembly of God ought to possess intelligence, and activity founded thereon. The world also, and all that makes an appearance in it, is judged from God’s point of view.

A few remarks on the position of Christians (that is, on the way in which this position is viewed with respect to Israel) will help us to understand this portion of the Word.

Israel is still regarded as the people of God. To the faith of James the nation has still the relationship which God

had given it towards Himself. The Christians in it are addressed as still forming part of a people whose links with God were not yet judicially broken; but it was only the Christians among them who possessed the faith which the Spirit gave in the true Messiah. These only among the people, with the writer, acknowledged Jesus as the Lord of glory. With the exception of verses 14, 15, in chapter 5, this epistle contains no exhortation which, in its spiritual height, goes beyond that which might be addressed to a godly Jew. It supposes indeed that the persons to whom it speaks have faith in the Lord Jesus; but it does not call them to that which is exclusively proper to Christianity and depends on its privileges. The exhortations flow from that higher source and breathe the more heavenly atmosphere, but the effect they aim at producing consists in real proofs of religion here below; they are such as might be heard in the professing church —a vast body like Israel, in the midst of which some Christians existed.

The epistle is not founded on christian relationships here below. It acknowledges them; but only as one fact in the midst of others, which have rights over the conscience of the writer. It supposes those whom it addresses to be in a relationship with God, which is known, unquestioned, and of ancient date; in the midst of which Christianity has been introduced.

It is important to notice the moral measure of the life which this epistle presents. As soon as we apprehend the position in which it views believers, the discernment of the truth on this point is not difficult. It is the same as that which Christ presented when walking in the midst of Israel and setting before His disciples the light, and the relationships with God, which resulted to them from

His presence. Now indeed He was absent; but that light and those relationships are retained as the measure of responsibility. And this the Lord's return would vindicate by judgment on those who refused to accept and walk in it. Until that day the faithful were to be patient in the midst of the oppression they were suffering from on the part of the Jews, who still blasphemed the holy name by which they were called.

It is the converse of the epistle to the Hebrews with regard to their relationships with the Jewish nation; not morally, but because of the nearness of the judgment when the epistle to the Hebrews was written.

The fundamental principles of the position that we have been speaking of are as follows: the law in its spirituality and perfection, as stated and summed up by Christ; a life imparted, which has the moral principles of the law, itself a divine life; the revelation of the Father's name. All this was true when the Lord was on the earth, and was the ground on which (however poorly they understood it) He then placed His disciples. He told them that they were to be witnesses of it, as of all He had said, after His death, distinguishing this testimony from that of the Holy Ghost.

It is this which James teaches here, with the addition of that which the Lord had also said—that He would come again. It is the doctrine of Christ with regard to walk in the midst of Israel, according to the light and the truths which He had introduced; and—seeing that He was still absent—an exhortation to perseverance and patience in that walk, waiting for the moment when, by judgment on those who oppressed them, He would vindicate the principles on which they walked. Although the judgment

executed on Jerusalem changed the position of the remnant of Israel in this respect, yet the life of Christ remains ever our model: and we have to wait with patience until the Lord come.

We have not in this epistle the association of the Christian with Christ exalted on high, nor consequently the thought of going to meet Him in the air, as Paul taught. But that which it contains ever remains true: and he who says that he abides in Him (Christ) ought also to walk even as He walked.

The judgment that was coming makes us understand the way in which James speaks of the world, of the rich who rejoice in their portion in the world, and the position of the believing remnant oppressed and suffering in the midst of the unbelieving nation; why he begins with the subject of the tribulations and so often recurs to it: why also he insists on practical evidences of faith. He still sees all Israel together; but some had received faith in the Lord of glory, and these were tempted to value the rich and the great in Israel. All being still Jews, we can easily understand that, while some truly believed and confessed their belief that Jesus was the Christ, yet, as these Christians followed the Jewish ordinances, mere professors might do as much without the least vital change being proved by their works. It is evident that a faith like this has no value whatever. It is precisely the faith of those who clamour for works in the present day —a mere dead profession of the truth of Christianity. To be begotten by the word of truth is as foreign and strange to them as to the Jews of whom James is speaking.

Believers being thus placed in the midst of Israel with some who merely professed faith, we can readily understand the apostle's address to the mass as those who might share in the privileges that existed in their midst; his address to Christians as having a special place of their own; and his warning to those who called themselves believers in Christ. Most easy and perfectly clear is the practical application to all times, and in particular when a mass of persons assume a right by inheritance to the privileges of the people of God. Besides this, the epistle has peculiar force for the individual conscience; it judges the position one is in, and the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The epistle then begins with an exhortation to rejoice in trial, as a means of producing patience. This subject in the main continues to the end of verse 20, where the idea turns towards the necessity of curbing everything that opposes itself to patience and towards the true character of one who stands in the presence of God. This address, as a whole, ends with the chapter. The connection of the reasoning is not always easy to find; the key to it is the moral condition with which the apostle's mind is occupied. I will endeavour to make the connection more apparent.

The subject in the main is, that we ought to walk before God to shew the reality of our profession in contrast with union with the world—practical religion. Patience then must have its perfect work; thus self-will is subdued, and the whole of God's will is accepted; consequently nothing is wanting to the practical life of the soul. The believer may suffer; but he patiently waits on the Lord. This Christ did; it was His perfection. He waited for the will of God, and never did His own will:

thus obedience was perfect, man thoroughly tested. But in fact we often lack wisdom to know what we ought to do. Here it says the resource is evident: we are to ask wisdom from God. He gives to all liberally; only we must count upon His faithfulness and upon an answer to our prayers. Otherwise the heart is double; there is dependence elsewhere than on God; our desires have another object. If we only seek that which God wills and that which God does, we depend securely on Him to accomplish it; and as to the circumstances of this world, which might make one believe that it was useless to depend on God, they vanish away as the flower of the field. We ought to have the consciousness that our place according to God is not that which is of this world. He who is in a low station should rejoice that Christianity exalts him; the rich, that it humbles him. It is not in riches that we are to rejoice (they pass away), but in the exercises of heart of which the apostle had been speaking; for after having been tried we shall receive the crown of life.

The life of one who is thus tried, and in whom this life develops itself in obedience to the entire will of God, is well worth that of a man who indulges all the desires of his heart in luxury.

Now with regard to temptations of this last character, into which the lusts of the heart cause men to fall, it must not be said that these lusts come from God: the heart of man is their source—its lusts which lead through sin to death. Let no one deceive himself on this point. That which inwardly tempts the heart comes from oneself. All good and perfect gifts come from God, and He never changes, He does nothing but good. Accordingly He has given us a new nature, the fruit of

His own will working in us by the word of truth, in order that we should be as it were first-fruits of His creatures. The Father of lights, that which is darkness does not come from Him.

By the word of truth He has begotten us to be the first and most excellent witnesses of that power of good which will shine forth hereafter in the new creation, of which we are the first-fruits. This is the opposite of being the source of corrupt desires. The word of truth is the good seed of life; self-will is the cradle of our lusts—its energy can never produce the fruits of divine nature; nor the wrath of man the righteousness of God. Therefore we are called to be docile, to be ready to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, to lay aside all filthiness of the flesh, all energy of iniquity, and to receive the word with meekness—a word which, while it is the word of God, identifies itself with the new nature that is in us (it is planted in us) while forming and developing it according to its own perfection; because this nature itself has its origin from God through the word.

It is not as a law which is outside us, and which, being opposed to our sinful nature, condemns us. This word saves the soul; it is living and quickening, and it works livingly in a nature that flows from it, and which it forms and enlightens.

But it is necessary to be doers of the word, not merely to hear it with the ear, but that it should produce the practical fruits which are the proof that it works really and vitally in the heart. Otherwise the word is only as a mirror in which we may perhaps see ourselves for a moment, and then forget what we have seen. He who looks into the perfect law, which is that of liberty, and

continues in it, doing the work which it presents, shall be blessed in the real and obedient activity developed in him.

This law is perfect; for the word of God, all that the Spirit of God has expressed, is the expression of the nature and the character of God, of that which He is and of that which He wills: for, when fully revealed (and till then man cannot fully know Him), He wills that which He is, and this necessarily.

This law is the law of liberty, because the same word which reveals what God is and what He wills has made us partakers by grace of the divine nature; so that not to walk according to that word would be not to walk according to our own new nature. Now to walk according to our own new nature, and that the nature of God, and guided by His word, is true liberty.

The law given on Sinai was the expression in man, written not on the heart but outside man, of what man's conduct and heart ought to be according to the will of God. It represses and condemns all the motions of the natural man, and cannot allow him to have a will, for he ought to do the will of God. But he has another will, and therefore the law is bondage to him, a law of condemnation and death. Now, God having begotten us by the word of truth, the nature that we have, as thus born of God, possesses tastes and desires according to that word; it is of that very word. The word in its own perfection develops this nature, forms it, enlightens it, as we have said; but the nature itself has its liberty in following it. Thus it was with Christ; if His liberty could have been taken away (which spiritually was

impossible), it would have been by preventing Him from doing the will of God the Father.

It is the same with the new man in us (which is Christ as life in us) which is created in us according to God in righteousness and true holiness, produced in us by the word, which is the perfect revelation of God—of the whole divine nature in man; of which Christ, the living Word, the image of the invisible God, is the manifestation and the pattern. The liberty of the new man is liberty to do the will of God, to imitate God in character, as being His dear child, according as that character was presented in Christ. The law of liberty is this character, as it is revealed in the word, in which the new nature finds its joy and satisfaction; even as it drew its existence from the word which reveals Him, and from the God who is therein revealed. Such is the “law of liberty “—the character of God Himself in us formed by the operation of a nature, begotten through the word which reveals Him, moulding itself upon the word.

The first and most sifting index of the inner man is the tongue. A man who appears to be in relationship with God and to honour Him, yet who cannot bridle his tongue, deceives himself, and his religion is vain.

Pure religion before God and the Father is to care for those who, reached in the tenderest relationships by the wages of sin, are deprived of their natural supports; and to keep oneself untainted by the world. Instead of striving to exalt oneself and gain reputation in a world of vanity, afar from God, our activities turn, as God does, to the sorrowful, who in their affliction, need succour; and we keep ourselves from a world in which everything is defiling, and contrary to the new nature which is our

life, and to the character of God as we know it by the word.

Chapter 2. The apostle now enters on the subject of those who professed to believe that Jesus was Christ the Lord. Before, in chapter 1, he had spoken of the new nature in connection with God: here the profession of faith in Christ is brought to the same touchstone—the reality of the fruits produced by it in contrast with this world. All these principles— the value of the name of Jesus, the essence of the law as Christ presented it, and the law of liberty—are brought forward to test the reality of their professed faith, or to convince the professor that he did not possess it. Two things are reprobated: having respect to the outward appearance of persons; and the absence of good works as a proof of the sincerity of the profession.

First, then, he blames respect for outward appearance of persons. They profess faith in the Lord Jesus, and yet hold with the spirit of the world! He replies that God has chosen the poor, making them rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. These professors had despised them; these rich men blasphemed the name of Christ and persecuted Christians.

In the second place he appeals to the practical summary of the law, of which Jesus had spoken—the royal law. They broke the law itself in favouring the rich. Now the law did not allow of any infraction whatsoever of its commands, because the authority of the legislator was concerned. In despising the poor, they were assuredly not loving their neighbour as themselves.

In the third place they ought to walk as those whose responsibility was measured by the law of liberty, in

which—possessing a nature which tasted and loved that which was of God—they were set free from all that was contrary to Him; so that they could not excuse themselves if they admitted principles which were not those of God Himself. This introduction of the divine nature leads the apostle on to speak of the mercy by which God glorifies Himself. The man who shews no mercy will find himself the object of the judgment which he has loved.

The second part of the chapter is connected with this; for he begins his discourse on works, as proofs of faith, by speaking of this mercy which answers to the nature and character of God, of which, as born of Him, the true Christian is made a partaker. The profession of having faith without this life— the existence of which is proved by works—can profit no one. This is plain enough. I say the profession of having faith, because the epistle says it: “If a man say he hath faith.” This is the key to this part of the epistle. He says it: where is the proof of it? Works are the proof; and it is in this way that the apostle uses them. A man says he hath faith. It is not a thing that we can see. I say therefore with reason, “Shew it me.” This is the evidence of faith which is required for man—it is only by its fruits that we make it evident to men; for the faith itself cannot be seen. But if I produce these fruits, then assuredly I have the root, without which there could not be the fruits. Thus faith does not shew itself to others, nor can I recognise it, without works; but works, the fruit of faith, prove the existence of faith.

That which follows shews that he is speaking of the profession of a doctrine, true perhaps in itself—of certain truths being confessed; for it is a real faith

looked at—certainty of knowledge and conviction—which devils have of the unity of the Godhead. They do not doubt it; but there is no link at all between their heart and God by means of a new nature— far indeed from it.

But the apostle confirms this, by the case of men in whom the opposition to the divine nature is not so apparent. Faith, the recognition of the truth with respect to Christ, is dead without works; that is, such a faith as produces none is dead.

We see (v. 16) that the faith of which the apostle speaks is a profession devoid of reality; verse 19 shews that it may be an unfeigned certainty that the thing is true: but the life begotten by the word, so that a relationship is formed between the soul and God, is entirely wanting. Because this takes place through the word, it is faith; being begotten of God we have a new life. This life acts, that is to say, faith acts, according to the relationship with God, by works which flow naturally from it, and which bear testimony to the faith that produced them.

From verse 20 to the end he presents a fresh proof of his thesis, founded on the last principle that I have mentioned. Now these proofs have nothing at all to do with the fruits of a kindly nature (for there are such), appertaining to us as creatures, but not to that life which has for its source the word of God, by which He begets us. The fruits of which the apostle speaks, bear testimony by their very character to the faith that produced them. Abraham offered up his son; Rahab received the messengers of Israel, associating herself with the people of God when everything was against them, and separating herself from her own people by

faith. All sacrificed for God, all given up for His people before they had gained one victory, and while the world was in full power, such were the fruits of faith. One referred to God; and believed Him in the most absolute way, against all that is in nature or on which nature can count; the other owned God's people, when all was against them; but neither was the fruit of an amiable nature or natural good, such as men call good works. One was a father going to put his son to death, the other a bad woman betraying her country. Certainly the scripture was fulfilled which said that Abraham believed God. How could he have acted as he did, if he had not believed Him? Works put a seal on his faith: and faith without works is but like the body without the soul, an outward form devoid of the life that animates it. Faith acts in the works (without it the works are a nullity, they are not those of the new life), and the works complete the faith which acts in them; for in spite of trial, and in the trial, faith is in activity. Works of law have no part in it. The outward law which exacts, is not a life which produces (apart from this divine nature) these holy and loving dispositions which, having God and His people for their object, value nothing else.

James, remark, never says that works justify us before God; for God can see the faith without its works. He knows that life is there. It is in exercise with regard to Him, towards Him, by trust in His word, in Himself, by receiving His testimony in spite of everything within and without. This God sees and knows. But when our fellow-creatures are in question, when it must be said "shew me," then faith, life, shews itself in works. {Jam 3}

In chapter 3 the apostle recurs to the tongue, the most ready index to the heart, the proof whether the new man

is in action, whether nature and self-will are under restraint. But there is hardly anything here which needs remark, although much that demands the hearing ear. Where there is the divine life, knowledge does not display itself in mere words, but in the walk and by works in which the meekness of true wisdom will be seen. Bitterness and contention are not the fruits of a wisdom that comes from above, but are earthly, of the nature of a man, and of the enemy.

The wisdom that comes from above, having its place in the life, in the heart, has three characteristics. First of all, the character of purity, for the heart is in communion with God— has intercourse with Him; therefore, there must needs be this purity. Next, it is peaceable, gentle, ready to yield to the will of another. Then, full of good works, acting by a principle which, as its origin and motives are from above, does good without partiality; that is to say, its action is not guided by the circumstances which influence the flesh and the passions of men. For the same reason it is sincere and unfeigned. Purity, absence of will and self, activity in good, such are the characteristics of heavenly wisdom.

These directions to bridle the tongue, as the first movement and expression of the will of the natural man, extend to believers. There are not to be (as to the inward disposition of the man) many teachers. We all fail; and to teach others and fail ourselves only increases our condemnation. For vanity can easily be fed in teaching others; and that is a very different thing from having the life quickened by the power of truth. The Holy Ghost bestows His gifts as He pleases. The apostle speaks here of the propensity in any one to teach, not of the gift he may have received for teaching.

In all that follows (chap. 4) we have still the judgment of unbridled nature, of will in its different forms: contentions that arise from the lusts of the natural heart; requests made to God proceeding from the same source; the desires of the flesh and of the mind developing themselves and finding their sphere in the friendship of the world, which is thus enmity against God. The nature of man covets enviously, is full of envy with regard to others. But God gives more grace: there is counteracting power, if one is content to be little and humble, to be as nothing in the world. The grace and favour of God are with such a one; for He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Upon this, the apostle unfolds the action of a soul directed by the Spirit of God, in the midst of the unbelieving and selfish multitude with whom it was associated (v. 6-10). For he still supposes the believers whom he addressed to be in connection with the law. If they spoke evil of their brother, to whom the law gave a place before God, they spoke evil of the law,114 according to which his value was so great. Judgment belonged to God, who had given the law, and who would vindicate His own authority as well as grant deliverance and salvation.

Verses 13-16. The same self-will and forgetfulness of God are blamed, the false confidence that flows from reckoning upon being able to do as one pleases—the absence of dependence on God. Verse 17 is a general conclusion, founded on the principle already suggested (chap. 3:1), and on that which is said with regard to faith. The knowledge of good, without its practice, causes even the absence of the work which one could have performed to be a positive sin. The action of the new man is absent, that of the old man is present; for

the good is before our eyes—we know what we ought to do, and do not choose to do it; there is no inclination to do it—we will not do it. {Jam 5}

Chapter 5. The two classes in Israel are distinctly marked here in contrast with one another, with the addition of the walk which the Christian ought to pursue when chastised by the Lord.

The apostle gives the coming of the Lord as the term of their condition, both to the unbelieving rich oppressors in Israel, and to the poor believing remnant. The rich have heaped up treasures for the last days; the oppressed poor are to be patient until the Lord Himself shall come to deliver them. Moreover, he says, deliverance would not be delayed. The husbandman waits for the rain and the time of harvest; the Christian for his Master's coming. This patience characterises, as we have seen, the walk of faith. It had been witnessed in the prophets; and in the case of others we count them happy which endure afflictions for the Lord's sake. Job shews us the ways of the Lord: he needed to have patience, but the end of the Lord was blessing and tender mercy towards him.

This expectation of the coming of the Lord was a solemn warning, and at the same time the strongest encouragement, but one which maintained the true character of the Christian's practical life. It shewed also what the selfishness of man's will would end in, and it restrained all action of that will in believers. The feelings of brethren towards each other were placed under the safeguard of this same truth. They were not to have a spirit of discontent, or to murmur against others

who were perhaps more favoured in their outward circumstances: “the judge stood before the door.”

Oaths displayed still more the forgetfulness of God, and the actings consequently of the self-will of nature. “Yea,” ought to be yea, and “Nay,” nay. The actings of the divine nature in the consciousness of the presence of God, and the repression of all human will and of sinful nature, is what the writer of this epistle desires.

Now there were resources in Christianity both for joy and sorrow. If any were afflicted, let them pray (God was ready to hear); if happy, let them sing; if sick, send for the elders of the assembly, who would pray for the sufferer and anoint him, and the chastisement would be removed, and the sins for which, according to God’s government, he was thus chastised, would be forgiven as regards that government; for it is that only which is here spoken of.

The imputation of sin for condemnation has no place here. The efficacy of the prayer of faith is set before us; but it is in connection with the maintenance of sincerity of heart. The government of God is exercised with regard to His people. He chastises them by sickness; and it is important that truth in the inner man should be maintained. Men hide their faults; they desire to walk as if all were going on well; but God judges His people. He tries the heart and the reins. They are held in bonds of affliction. God shews them their faults, or their unbroken self-will. Man “is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain,” Job 33:19. And now the church of God intervenes in charity, and according to its own order, by means of the elders; the sick man commits himself to God,

confessing his state of need; the charity of the church acts and brings him who is chastised, according to this relationship, before God—for that is where the church is. Faith pleads this relationship of grace; the sick man is healed. If sins—and not merely the need of discipline—were the cause of his chastisement, those sins will not hinder his being healed, they shall be forgiven him.

The apostle then presents the principle in general as the course for all, namely, to open their hearts to each other, in order to maintain truth in the inner man as to oneself; and to pray for each other in order that charity should be in full exercise with regard to the faults of others; grace and truth being thus spiritually formed in the church, and a perfect union of heart among Christians, so that even their faults are an occasion for the exercise of charity (as in God towards us), and entire confidence in each other, according to that charity, such as is felt towards a restoring and pardoning God. What a beautiful picture is presented of divine principles animating men and causing them to act according to the nature of God Himself, and the influence of His love upon the heart.

We may remark, that it is not confession to the elders that is spoken of. That would have been confidence in men—official confidence. God desires the operation of divine charity in all. Confession to one another shews the condition of the church, and God would have the church to be in such a state, that love should so reign in it, that they should be so near to God, as to be able to treat the transgressor according to the grace they know in Him: and that this love should be so realised, that perfect inward sincerity should be produced by the confidence and operation of grace. Official confession

destroys all this— is contrary to it. How divine the wisdom which omitted confession when speaking of the elders, but which commands it as the living and voluntary impression of the heart!

This leads us also to the value of the energetic prayers of the righteous man. It is his nearness to God, the sense that he has consequently of that which God is, which (through grace and the operation of the Spirit) gives him this power. God takes account of men, and that according to the infinitude of His love. He takes account of the trust in Himself, the faith in His word, shewn by one who thinks and acts according to a just appreciation of what He is. That is always faith, which makes sensible to us that which we do not see—God Himself, who acts in accordance with the revelation that He has given of Himself. Now the man who in the practical sense is righteous through grace, is near to God; as being righteous, he has not to do with God for himself with regard to sin, which would keep his heart at a distance; his heart is thus free to draw nigh to God, according to His holy nature on behalf of others; and, moved by the divine nature, which animates him and which enables him to appreciate God, he seeks, according to the activity of that nature, that his prayers may prevail with God, whether for the good of others or for the glory of God Himself in his service. And God answers, according to that same nature, by blessing this trust and responding to it, in order to manifest what He is for faith, to encourage it by sanctioning its activity, putting His seal on the man who walks by faith.115 The Spirit of God acts, we know, in all this; but the apostle does not here speak of Him, being occupied with the practical effect, and presenting the man as he is seen, acting

under the influence of this nature in its positive energy with regard to God, and near to Him, so that it acts in all its intensity, moved by the power of that nearness. But if we consider the action of the Spirit, these thoughts are confirmed. The righteous man does not grieve the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit works in him according to His own power, not having to set his conscience right with God, but acting in the man according to the power of his communion.

Finally, we have the assurance that the ardent and energetic prayer of the righteous man has great efficacy: it is the prayer of faith, which knows God and counts upon Him and draws near Him.

The case of Elijah is interesting, as shewing us (and there are other examples of the same kind) how the Holy Ghost acts inwardly in a man where we see the outward manifestation of power. In the history we have Elijah's declaration: "Jehovah liveth, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." This is the authority, the power, exercised in the name of Jehovah. In our epistle the secret operation, that which passes between the soul and God, is set forth. He prayed, and God heard him. We have the same testimony on the part of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. Only that in the latter case we have the two together, except that the prayer itself is not given—unless in the unutterable groan of Christ's spirit.

Comparing Galatians 2 with the history of Acts 15, we find a revelation from God which determined Paul's conduct, whatever outward motives there may have been which were known to all. By such cases as those which the apostle proposes to the church, and those of

Elijah and the Lord Jesus, a God, living, acting, and interesting Himself in all that happens among His people, is revealed to us.

There is also the activity of love towards those who err. If any one departs from the truth, and they bring him back by grace, let it be known that to bring back a sinner for the error of his ways is the exercise—simple as our action in it may be— of the power that delivers a soul from death; accordingly all those sins which spread themselves in their odious nature before the eyes of God, and offended His glory and His heart by their presence in His universe, are covered. The soul being brought to God by grace, all its sins are pardoned, appear no more, are blotted out from before the face of God. The apostle (as throughout) does not speak of the power that acts in this work of love, but of the fact. He applies it to cases that had happened among them; but he establishes a universal principle with regard to the activity of grace in the heart that is animated by it. The erring soul is saved; the sin is put away from before God.

Charity in the assembly suppresses, so to speak, the sins which otherwise would destroy union and overcome that charity in the assembly, and appear in all their deformity and all their malignancy before God. Whereas, being met by love in the assembly, they go no farther, are, as it were (as regards the state of things before God in this world), dissolved and put away by the charity which they could not vanquish. The sin is vanquished by the love which dealt with it, disappears, is swallowed up by it. Thus love covers a multitude of sins. Here it is its action in the conversion of a sinner.

114 Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:8, where the Spirit takes the place of the law here.

115 It is well to remember that this is carried out in respect of the governing ways of God, and thus under the title of Lord—a place which Christ specially holds, though here the term is used generally. Compare verse r i, and the general Jewish reference of the passage. To us we have one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ. He is become Lord and Christ, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

1 Peter

The first epistle of Peter is addressed to believers among the dispersed of Israel found in those provinces of Asia Minor which are named in the first verse; the second epistle declares itself to be a second addressed to the same persons: so that the one and the other were destined for the Jews of Asia Minor (that is, to those among them who had the same precious faith as the apostle).

The first epistle is founded on the doctrine of the heavenly calling (I do not say of the assembly on earthy116 which is not brought before us here) in contrast with the portion of the Jews on the earth. It presents Christians, and in particular Christians among the Jews, as pilgrims and strangers on earth. The conduct suited to such is more largely developed than the doctrine. The Lord Jesus, who was Himself a pilgrim and a stranger here, is presented as a pattern in more than one aspect. Both epistles pursue the righteous government of God from the beginning to the consummation of all things, in which the elements melt with fervent heat, and there are new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. The first gives the government of God in favour of believers, the second in the judgment of the wicked.

Nevertheless, in presenting the heavenly calling, the apostle necessarily presents salvation—the deliverance of the soul in contrast with the temporal deliverance of the Jews.

The following is the description which the Spirit gives of these believers. They are elect, and that according to

the foreknowledge of God the Father. Israel was a nation elected on the earth by Jehovah. Here, it is those who were foreknown of the Father. The means by which their election is carried out is sanctification of the Holy Ghost. They are really set apart by the power of the Spirit. Israel was set apart by ordinances; but these are sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ and for the sprinkling of His blood, that is to say, on the one hand to obey as He obeyed, and on the other to be sprinkled with His blood and thus to be perfectly clear before God. Israel had been set apart for the obedience of the law, and for that blood which, while it announced death as the sanction of its authority, could never cleanse the soul from sin.

Such was the Christian's position. The apostle wishes them grace and peace—the known portion of believers. He reminds them of the blessings with which God had blessed them, blessing God who had bestowed them. Believing Israelites knew Him now, not in the character of Jehovah, but as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That which the apostle presents as the fruit of His grace, is a hope beyond this world; not the inheritance of Canaan, appropriate to man living on the earth, which was the hope of Israel, and is still that of the unbelieving nation. The mercy of God had begotten them again for a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from out of the dead. This resurrection shewed them a portion in another world, and the power which brought man into it, although he had been subjected to death: he would enter it by resurrection, through the glorious triumph of the Saviour, to share an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The apostle is not

speaking of our resurrection with Christ; he views the Christian as a pilgrim here, encouraged by the triumph of Christ Himself in resurrection, which animated him by the consciousness that there was a world of light and happiness before him, and a power which would bring him into this world. Consequently the inheritance is spoken of as “reserved in heaven.” In the epistle to the Ephesians we are seated in the heavens in Christ, and the inheritance is that of all things of which Christ Himself is heir. But the Christian is also in fact a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth; and it is a strong consolation to us, in our pilgrimage, to see this heavenly inheritance before us, as a certain pledge of our own entrance into it.

Another inestimable consolation is added. If the inheritance is preserved in heaven for us, we are kept by the power of God all through our pilgrimage that we may enjoy it at the end. Sweet thought!—we are kept here below through all our dangers and difficulties; and, on the other hand, the inheritance there, where there is no defilement or possibility of decay.

But it is by moral means that this power preserves us (and it is in this way that Peter always speaks), by the operation in us of grace, which fixes the heart on objects that keep it in connection with God and with His promise (compare 2 Peter 1:4). We are kept by the power of God through faith. It is, God be praised, the power of God Himself; but it acts by sustaining faith in the heart, maintaining it in spite of all temptations above all the defilement of the world, and filling the affection with heavenly things. Peter, however, always occupied with the ways of God respecting this world, only looks at the share that believers will have in this salvation, this

heavenly glory, when it shall be manifested; when God will, by this glory, establish His authority in blessing on the earth. It is indeed the heavenly glory, but the heavenly glory manifested as the means of the establishment of the supreme government of God on earth, for His own glory and for the blessing of the whole world.

It is salvation ready to be revealed in the last times. This word “ready” is important. Our apostle says also that the judgment is ready to be revealed. Christ is glorified personally, has conquered all His enemies, has accomplished redemption. He only waits for one thing, namely, that God should make His enemies His footstool. He has taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, because He has accomplished everything as to glorifying God where sin was. It is the actual salvation of souls—the gathering together of His own, which is not yet finished (2 Pet. 3:9, 15); but when once all they who are to share it are brought in, there is nothing to wait for as regards the salvation, that is to say, the glory in which the redeemed will appear;117 nor consequently as regards the judgment of the wicked on earth, which will be consummated by the manifestation of Christ.118 All is ready. This thought is sweet for us in our days of patience, but full of solemnity when we reflect upon the judgment.

Yes, as the apostle says, we rejoice greatly in this salvation, which is ready to be revealed in the last times. We are waiting for it. It is a time of rest, of the earth’s blessing, of the full manifestation of His glory who is worthy of it, who was humbled and who suffered for us; the time when the light and the glory of God in Christ

will illumine the world, and first bind and then chase away all its evil.

This is our portion: abundant joy in the salvation about to be revealed, and in which we may always rejoice; although, if it be needed for our good, we may be in sorrow through divers temptations. But it is only for a very little while—only a light affliction, which passes away, and which only comes upon us if it be needful, in order that the precious trial of faith may have its result in praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, for whom we are waiting. That is the end of all our sorrows and trials; transitory and light as they are, in comparison with the vast result of the excellent and eternal glory towards which they are leading us, according to the wisdom of God and the need of our souls. The heart attaches itself to Jesus: He will appear.

We love Him, although we have never seen Him. In Him, though now we see Him not, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is this which decides and forms the heart, which fixes it and fills it with joy, however it may be with us in this life. To our hearts it is He who fills all the glory. By grace I shall be glorified, I shall have the glory; but I love Jesus, my heart pants for His presence—desires to see Him. Moreover we shall be like Him, and He perfectly glorified. The apostle may well say, “unspeakable and full of glory.” The heart can desire nothing else: and if some light afflictions are needful for us, we endure them gladly, since they are a means of forming us for the glory. And we can rejoice at the thought of Christ’s appearing; for in receiving Him, unseen, into our heart we receive the salvation of our soul. This is the object and the end of faith; far more precious than the temporal deliverances that Israel

enjoyed, although the latter were tokens of the favour of God.

The apostle goes on to develop the three successive steps of the revelation of this grace of salvation—the full and entire deliverance from the consequences, the fruits, and the misery of sin: the prophecies; the testimony of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; the manifestation of Jesus Christ Himself, when the deliverance that had been already announced should be fully accomplished.

It is interesting to see here how the rejection of the Messiah, according to Jewish hopes, already anticipated and announced in the prophets, necessarily made way for a salvation which brought with it that of the soul likewise. Jesus was no more seen; the earthly portion was not realised by His first coming; salvation was to be revealed in the last times. But thus a salvation of the soul was unfolded, the whole extent of which would be realised in the glory about to be revealed; for it was the spiritual joy of the soul in a heavenly Jesus who was not seen, and who in His death had accomplished expiation for sin, and in His resurrection, according to the power of the life of the Son of God, had begotten again to a living hope. By faith then this salvation was received—this true deliverance. It was not yet the glory and the outward rest; that salvation would indeed take place when Jesus appeared, but meantime the soul already enjoyed by faith this perfect rest, and in hope even the glory itself.

Now the prophets had announced the grace of God which was to be accomplished for believers, and which even now imparts to the soul the enjoyment of that

salvation; and they had searched into their own prophecies, which they had received by inspiration from God, seeking to understand what time, and what manner of time, the Spirit indicated, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow. For the Spirit spoke of them both by the prophets, and signified consequently more than a temporal deliverance in Israel; for the Messiah was to suffer. And they discovered that it was not for themselves nor for their own times, that the Spirit of Christ announced these truths with regard to the Messiah, but for Christians. But Christians, while receiving the salvation of the soul by the revelation of a Christ seated in heaven after His sufferings and coming again in glory, have not received those glories which were revealed to the prophets. These things have been reported with great and divine plainness by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven after the death of Jesus: but the Spirit does not bestow the glory itself in which the Lord will appear; He has only declared it. Christians have therefore to gird up the loins of their mind, to be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that (in effect) will be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Such are the three successive steps in God's dealings: the prediction of the events relating to Christ, which went altogether beyond Jewish blessings; the things reported by the Spirit; the accomplishment of the things promised when Christ is revealed.

That, then, which the apostle presents, is a participation in the glory of Christ when He shall be revealed; that salvation, of which the prophets had spoken, which was to be revealed in the last days. But meantime God had begotten again the believing Jews to a living hope by the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead; and by means of His sufferings had made them comprehend that even now, while waiting for the revelation of the glory, realising it in the Person of Jesus, they enjoyed a salvation of the soul before which the deliverances of Israel faded away and might be forgotten. It was indeed the salvation “ready to be revealed “in all its fulness; but as yet they only possessed it in respect of the soul. But, being detached from the manifestation of the earthly glory, this salvation had a yet more spiritual character. Therefore they were to gird up their loins, while waiting for the revelation of Jesus, and to acknowledge with thanksgiving that they were in possession of the end of their faith. They were in relationship with God.

When announcing these things by the ministry of the prophets, God had Christians in view, and not the prophets themselves. This grace was in due time to be communicated to believers; but meantime, for faith and for the soul, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven bore testimony to it. It was to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, which was the guarantee of the accomplishment of all the promises and the power of life for their enjoyment, had begotten them again unto a living hope; but the right to enjoy the effect of the promise was founded on another truth. To this the exhortations conduct us. They were to walk as obedient children, no longer following the lusts that had led them in the days of their ignorance. Called by Him who is holy, they were to be holy in all their conversation, as it is written. Moreover, if they called on the Father, who, regardless of man’s pretension to respect, judged according to every one’s work, they were to pass the time of their sojourn here in fear.

Observe, here, that he is not speaking of the final judgment of the soul. In that sense “the Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son.” The thing spoken of here is the daily judgment of God’s government in this world, exercised with regard to His children. Accordingly it says, “the time of your sojourn here.” It is a judgment applied to christian life. The fear spoken of is not an uncertainty as to salvation and redemption. It is a fear founded on the certainty that one is redeemed; and the immense price, the infinite value of the means employed for our redemption—namely, the blood of the Lamb, without blemish and without spot—is the motive for fearing God during our pilgrimage. We have been redeemed at the cost of the blood of Jesus from our vain conversation: can we then still walk according to the principles from which we have been thus delivered? Such a price for our deliverance demands that we should walk with circumspection and gravity before the Father, with whom we desire to have intercourse both as privilege and spiritual relationship.

The apostle then applies this truth to the Christians whom he was addressing. The Lamb had been ordained in the counsels of God before the world was made; but He was manifested in the last days for believers: and these are presented in their true character, they believe in God by Jesus—by this Lamb. It is not by means of the creation that they believe: although creation is a testimony to His glory, it gives no rest to the conscience and does not tell of a place in heaven. It is not by means of providence, which, even while directing all things, yet leaves the government of God in such profound darkness. Nor is it by means of the revelation of God on

Mount Sinai under the name of Jehovah and the terror connected with a broken law. It is by means of Jesus, the Lamb of God, that we believe; observe that it is not said, in Him, but, “by Him “in God. We know God as the One who, when we were sinners and dead in our trespasses and sins, loved us, and gave this precious Saviour to come down even into the death in which we were, to take part in our position as lying under this judgment, and die as the Lamb of God. We believe in God who by His power, when Jesus was there for us—in our stead—raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory. It is in a Saviour-God therefore, a God who exercises His power in our behalf, that we believe by Jesus, so that our faith and our hope are in God. It does not say in something before God, but in God Himself. Where then shall any cause for fear or distrust arise as regards God, if our faith and hope are in Himself? This changes everything. The aspect in which we view God Himself is entirely changed; and this change is founded on that which establishes the righteousness of God in accepting us as cleansed from all sin, the love of God in blessing us perfectly in Jesus, whom His power has raised from the dead and glorified—the power according to which He blesses us. Our faith and our hope are in God Himself.

This places us in the most intimate of relationships with the rest of the redeemed: objects of the same love, washed by the same precious blood, redeemed by the same Lamb, they become —to those whose hearts are purified by the reception of the truth through the Spirit —the objects of a tender brotherly love, a love unfeigned. They are our brethren. Let us then love one another fervently with a pure heart. But this is based on another essentially vital principle. It is a new nature

which acts in this affection. If we are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb without spot, we are born of the incorruptible seed of the word of God, which lives and abides for ever. For the flesh is but grass, the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, its flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever. This is the word of the gospel which has been preached unto us. It is an eternal principle of blessing. The believer is not born after the flesh to enjoy temporary rights and blessings, as was the case with a Jew, but of an incorruptible seed, a principle of life as unchangeable as the word of God Himself. The prophet had told them so, when comforting the people of God; all flesh, the nation itself, was but withered grass. God was unchangeable, and the word which by its immutable certainty secured divine blessings to the objects of God's favour, wrought in the heart to beget a life as immortal and incorruptible as the word which is its source.

Thus cleansed therefore and born of the word, they were to put off all fraud, hypocrisy, envy, slander; and, as new-born babes, to seek for this milk of the understanding, in order to grow thereby (for the word is the milk of the child, as it was the seed of its life); and we are to receive it as babes in all simplicity, if in truth we have felt that the Lord is good and full of grace. It is not Sinai (where the Lord God declared His law from the midst of the fire, so that they entreated not to hear His voice any more), to which I am come, or from which the Lord is speaking. If I have tasted and understood that the Lord acts in grace, that He is love towards me, and that His word is the expression of that grace, even as it communicates life, I shall desire to feed on this milk of the understanding, which the believer enjoys in proportion

to his simplicity; that good word which announces to me nothing but grace, and the God whom I need as all grace, full of grace, acting in grace, as revealing Himself to me in this character—a character which He can never cease to maintain towards me, making me a partaker of His holiness.

I now know the Lord Himself: I have tasted that which He is. Moreover this is still in contrast with the legal condition of the Jew, although it is the fulfilment of that which the Psalms and the prophets had declared (the resurrection having plainly revealed in addition a heavenly hope). It was they themselves who were now the spiritual house, the holy priesthood. They came to the Living Stone, rejected indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, and they were built up on Him as living stones. The apostle delights in this word "living." It was to him the Father had revealed that Jesus was the Son of the living God. No one else had then confessed Him as such, and the Lord told him that on this rock (that is, on the Person of the Son of God in power of life, manifested in the resurrection, which declared Him to be such) He would build His assembly. Peter, by his faith, participated in the nature of this living rock. Here then (chap. 2:5) he extends this character to all believers, and exhibits the holy house built on the Living Stone, which God Himself had laid as the chief corner-stone elect and precious. Whosoever believed in Him should not be confounded.119 Now, it was not only in the eyes of God that this Stone was precious, but in the eyes of faith which—feeble as the possessors of it may be—sees as God sees. To unbelievers this stone was a stone of stumbling and of offence. They stumbled at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were

appointed. It does not say that they were appointed to sin nor to condemnation, but these unbelieving and disobedient sinners, the Jewish race—long rebellious, and continually exalting themselves against God—were destined to find in the Lord of grace Himself a rock of offence; and to stumble and fall upon that which was to faith the precious stone of salvation. It was to this particular fall that their unbelief was destined.

Believers, on the contrary, entered into the enjoyment of the promises made to Israel, and that in the most excellent way. Grace—and the very faithfulness of God—had brought the fulfilment of the promise in the Person of Jesus, the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to fulfil the promises made to the fathers. And, although the nation had rejected Him, God would not deprive of the blessings those who—in spite of all this difficulty to faith and to the heart—had submitted to the obedience of faith, and attached themselves to Him who was the despised of the nation. They could not have the blessing of Israel with the nation on earth, because the nation had rejected Him; but they were brought fully into the relationship with God of a people accepted of Him. The heavenly character which the blessing now assumed did not destroy their acceptance according to the promise; only they entered into it according to grace. For the nation, as a nation, had lost it; not only long ago by disobedience, but now by rejecting Him who came in grace to impart to them the effect of the promise.

The apostle, therefore, applies the character of “holy nation “to the elect remnant, investing them in the main with the titles bestowed in Exodus 19 on condition of obedience, but here in connection with the Messiah,

their enjoyment of these titles being founded on His obedience and rights acquired by their faith in Him.

But, the privileges of the believing remnant being founded on the Messiah, the apostle goes farther, and applies to them the declarations of Hosea, which relate to Israel and Judah when re-established in the fulness of blessing in the last days, enjoying those relationships with God into which grace will bring them at that time.

“Ye are,” he says, “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a purchased people.” These are almost the words of Exodus 19. He goes on: “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; who formerly had not obtained mercy, but have now obtained it.” These are the words of Hosea 2. This sets before us, in the most interesting way, the principle on which the blessing is founded. In Exodus the people were to have this blessing if they exactly obeyed the voice of God. But Israel had not obeyed, had been rebellious and stiff-necked, had gone after strange gods, and rejected the testimony of the Spirit; yet, after their unfaithfulness, God Himself has laid in Zion a Stone, a chief corner-stone, and whosoever believed in Him should not be confounded. It is grace that, when Israel had failed in every respect, and on the ground of obedience, had lost everything, God should bestow on them by Jesus, through grace, that which was promised them at first on condition of obedience. In this way all was secured to them.

The question of obedience was settled—on Israel’s disobedience—by grace, and by the obedience of Christ, the foundation laid by God in Zion. But this principle of grace abounding over sin—by which is shewn the

inability of disobedience to frustrate the purposes of God, for this grace came after the completion of disobedience—this principle, so glorious and so comforting to the convinced sinner, is confirmed in a striking way by the quotation from Hosea. In this passage from the prophet, Israel is presented, not merely as guilty, but as having already undergone judgment. God had declared that He would no more have mercy (with regard to His patience toward the ten tribes); and that Israel was no longer His people (in His judgment on unfaithful Judah). But afterwards, when the judgment had been executed, He returns to His irrevocable purposes of grace, and allures Israel as a forsaken wife, and gives her the valley of Achor—the valley of trouble, in which Achan was stoned, the first judgment on unfaithful Israel after their entrance into the promised land—for a door of hope. For judgment is changed into grace, and God begins all afresh upon a new principle. It was as though Israel had again come up out of Egypt, but upon an entirely new principle. He betroths her to Him for ever, in righteousness, in judgment, in grace, in mercy, and all is blessing. Then He calls her “Ruhama,” or, “the object of mercy”; and “Ammi,” “my people.”

These, then, are the expressions which the apostle uses, applying them to the remnant who believed in Jesus, the stumbling-stone to the nation, but the chief corner-stone from God to the believer. Thus the condition is taken away, and instead of a condition we have blessing after disobedience, and after judgment the full and assured grace of God, founded (in its application to believers) on the Person, the obedience, and the work of Christ.

It is affecting to see the expression of this grace in the term “Achor.” It was the first judgment on Israel in the land of promise for having profaned themselves with the forbidden thing. And there it is that hope is given; so entirely true is it that grace triumphs over justice. And it is this which has taken place in the most excellent way in Christ. The very judgment of God becomes in Him the door of hope, the guilt and the judgment having alike passed away for ever.

Two parts of the christian life—so far as it is the manifestation of spiritual power—result from this, in the double priesthood; of which the one answers to the present position of Christ on high, and the other anticipatively to the manifestation of His glory on earth —the priesthoods of Aaron, and of Melchizedec. For He is now within the veil according to the type of Aaron; hereafter He will be a priest on His throne—it will be the public manifestation of His glory on earth. Thus the saints exercise “a holy priesthood” (v. 5) to offer up spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Sweet privilege of the Christian, thus brought as near as possible to God! He offers— sure of being accepted, for it is by Jesus that he offers them—his sacrifices to God.

This part of the christian life is the first, the most excellent, the most vital, the source of the other (which is its expression here below); the most excellent, because, in its exercise, we are in immediate connection with the divine object of our affections. These spiritual sacrifices are the reflex, by the action of the Holy Ghost, of the grace which we enjoy; that which the heart returns to God, moved by the excellent gifts of which we are the object, and by the love which has given them. The heart (by the power of the Holy Ghost) reflects all

that has been revealed to it in grace, worshipping the Author and Giver of all according to the knowledge we have of Himself through this means; the fruits of the heavenly Canaan in which we participate presented as an offering to God; the entrance of the soul into the presence of God to praise and adore Him.

This is the holy priesthood, according to the analogy of the priesthood of Aaron, and of the temple at Jerusalem which God inhabited as His house.

The second priesthood of which the apostle speaks is to shew forth the virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. Its description is taken, as we have seen, from Exodus 19. It is a chosen generation, a holy nation, a royal priesthood. I only allude to the Melchizedec priesthood to shew the character of a royal priesthood. Priests, among the Jews, drew near to God. God had formed the people for Himself: they were to shew forth all His virtues, His praises. Christ will do this perfectly in the day of His glory. The Christian is called to do it now in this world. He is to reproduce Christ in this world. It is the second part of his life.

It will be noticed that the first chapter of this epistle presents the Christian as animated by hope, but under trial—the precious trial of faith. The second chapter presents him in his privileges as of a holy and royal priesthood, by means of faith.

After this (chap. 2:11), the apostle begins his exhortations. Whatever may be the privileges of the Christian, in his position as such, he is always viewed as a pilgrim, on the earth; and, as we have seen, the constant government of God is the object which presents

itself to the mind of the apostle. But he warns them first, with regard to that which is inward, against those sources from which the corruptions spring, that (in the scene of this government) would dishonour the name of God and even bring in judgment.

Their conversation was to be honest among the Gentiles. Christians bore the name of God. The mind of men, hostile to His name, sought to bring disgrace upon it, by attributing to Christians the evil conduct which they themselves followed without remorse, while at the same time complaining (chap. 4:4) that they would not go with them in the same excesses and disorder. The Christian had only to follow the path of faithfulness to God. In the day when God would visit men, these calumniators, with their will broken and their pride subdued by the visitation of God, should be brought to confess —by means of the good works which, in spite of their calumnies, had always reached their consciences—that God had acted in these Christians, that He had been present among them.

After this general exhortation, brief but important to believers, the apostle takes up the relative walk of Christians in a world where on the one hand God watches over all, yet where He permits His own to suffer, whether for righteousness sake or for the name of Christ, but where they ought never to suffer for having done wrong. The path then of the Christian is marked out. He is subject for the Lord’s sake to human ordinances or institutions. He gives honour to all men, and to each in his place, so that no one shall have any reproach to bring against him. He is submissive to his masters, even if they are bad men, and yields to their ill-treatment. Were he subject only to the good and gentle,

a worldly slave would do as much; but if, having done well, he suffers and bears it patiently, this is acceptable to God, this is grace. It was thus that Christ acted, and to this we are called. Christ suffered in this way, and never replied by reproaches or threats to those who molested Him, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously. To Him we belong. He has suffered for our sins, in order that, having been delivered from them, we should live to God. These Christians from among the Jews had been as sheep going astray;120 they were now brought back to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. But how entirely these exhortations shew that the Christian is one who is not of this world, but has his own path through it: yet this path was the way of peace in it!

Likewise, wives were to be subject to their husbands in all modesty and purity, in order that this testimony to the effect of the word by its fruits might take the place of the word itself, if their husbands would not listen to it. They were to rest, in patience and meekness, on the faithfulness of God, and not be alarmed at seeing the power of the adversaries (compare Phil. 1:28).

Husbands were in like manner to dwell with the wife, their affections and relationships being governed by christian knowledge, and not by any human passion; honouring the wife, and walking with her as being heirs together of the grace of life.

Finally, all were to walk in the spirit of peace and gentleness, carrying with them, in their intercourse with others, the blessing of which they were themselves the heirs, the spirit of which they ought consequently to bear ever with them. By following that which is good, by

having the tongue governed by the fear of the Lord, by avoiding evil and seeking peace, they would in quietness enjoy the present life under the eye of God. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who, moreover, would harm them, if they followed only that which is good?

This, then, is the government of God, the principle on which He superintends the course of this world. Nevertheless it is not now a direct and immediate government preventing all wrong. The power of evil still acts upon the earth; those who are animated by it shew themselves hostile to the righteous, and act by means of that fear which Satan is able to produce. But by giving the Lord His place in the soul, this fear which the enemy excites has no longer a place there. If the heart is conscious of the presence of God, can that heart tremble at the presence of the enemy? This is the secret of boldness and peace in confessing Christ. Then the instruments of the enemy seek to turn us aside, and to overwhelm us by their pretensions; but the consciousness of God's presence dissipates those pretensions, and destroys all their power. Resting on the strength of His presence, we are ready to answer those who ask the reason of our hope, with meekness and holy reverence remote from all levity. For all this it is necessary to have a good conscience. We may carry a bad conscience to God, that He may pardon and have mercy on us; but if we have a bad conscience, we cannot resist the enemy—we are afraid of him. On the one hand, we fear his malice; on the other, we have lost the consciousness of the presence and the strength of God. When walking before God, we fear nothing; the heart is

free: we have not to think of self, we think of God; and the adversaries are ashamed of having falsely accused those whose conduct is unblamable, and against whom nothing can be brought except the calumny of their enemies, which calumnies turn to their own shame.

It may be that God may see it good that we should suffer. If so, it is better that we should suffer for well doing than for evil doing. The apostle gives a touching motive for this: Christ has suffered for sins once for all; let that suffice; let us suffer only for righteousness. To suffer for sin was His task; He accomplished it, and that for ever; put to death, as to His life in the flesh, but quickened according to the power of the divine Spirit.

The passage that follows has occasioned difficulties to the readers of scripture; but it appears to me simple, if we perceive the object of the Spirit of God. The Jews expected a Messiah corporeally present, who should deliver the nation, and exalt the Jews to the summit of earthly glory. But He was not present, we know, in that manner, and the believing Jews had to endure the scoffs and the hatred of the unbelieving, on account of their trust in a Messiah who was not present, and who had wrought no deliverance for the people. Believers possessed the salvation of their soul, and they knew Jesus in heaven; but unbelieving men did not care for that. The apostle therefore cites the case of Noah’s testimony. The believing Jews were few in number, and Christ was theirs only according to the Spirit. By the power of that Spirit He had been raised up from the dead. It was by the power of the same Spirit that He had gone—without being corporeally present—to preach in Noah. The world was disobedient (like the Jews in the apostle’s days), and eight souls only were saved; even as

the believers were now but a little flock. But the spirits of the disobedient were now in prison, because they did not obey Christ present among them by His Spirit in Noah. The long-suffering of God waited then, as now, with the Jewish nation; the result would be the same. It has been so.

This interpretation is confirmed (in preference to that which supposes that the Spirit of Christ preached in hades to souls which had been confined there ever since the flood) by the consideration that in Genesis it is said, “My spirit shall not always strive with men, but their days shall be a hundred and twenty years.” That is to say, His Spirit should strive, in the testimony of Noah, during a hundred and twenty years and no longer. Now it would be an extraordinary thing that with those persons only (for he speaks only of them) the Lord should strive in testimony after their death. Moreover, we may observe that, in considering this expression to mean the Spirit of Christ in Noah, we only use a well-known phrase of Peter’s; for he it is, as we have seen, who said, “The Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets.”

These spirits then are in prison, because they did not hearken to the Spirit of Christ in Noah (compare 2 Pet. 2:5-9). To this the apostle adds, the comparison of baptism to the ark of Noah in the deluge. Noah was saved through the water; we also; for the water of baptism typifies death, as the deluge, so to speak, was the death of the world. Now Christ has passed through death and is risen. We enter into death in baptism; but it is like the ark, because Christ suffered in death for us, and has come out of it in resurrection, as Noah came out of the deluge, to begin, as it were, a new life in a

resurrection world. Now Christ, having passed through death, has atoned for sins; and we, by passing through it in spirit, leave all our sins in it, as Christ did in reality for us; for He was raised up without the sins which He expiated on the cross. And they were our sins; and thus, through the resurrection, we have a good conscience. We pass through death in spirit and in figure by baptism. The peace-giving force of the thing is the resurrection of Christ, after He had accomplished expiation; by which resurrection therefore we have a good conscience.

Now this is what the Jews had to learn. The Christ was gone up to heaven, all powers and principalities being made subject to Him. He is at the right hand of God. We have therefore not a Messiah on earth, but a good conscience and a heavenly Christ. {1Pe 4}

Chapter 4. From the beginning of this chapter to the end of verse 7, the apostle continues to speak of the general principles of God’s government, exhorting the Christian to act on the principles of Christ Himself, which would cause him to avoid the walk condemned by that government, while waiting for the judgment of the world by the Christ whom he served. Christ glorified, as we saw at the close of the previous chapter, was ready to judge; and they who were exasperated against the Christians, and who were led by their own passions, without caring for the coming judgment, would have to give account to that Judge whom they refused to own as Saviour.

Here, it will be observed, it is suffering for righteousness sake (chap. 2:19; 3:17) in connection with the government and judgment of God. The principle was this: they accepted, they followed the Saviour whom the

world and the nation rejected; they walked in His holy footsteps in righteousness, as pilgrims and strangers, abandoning the corruption that reigned in the world. Walking in peace and following after good, they avoided to a certain extent the attacks of others; and the eyes of Him, who watches from on high over all things, rested upon the righteous. Nevertheless, in the relations of ordinary life (chap. 2:18), and in their intercourse with men, they might have to suffer, and to bear flagrant injustice. Now the time of God's judgment was not yet come. Christ was in heaven; He had been rejected on the earth, and the Christian's part was to follow him. The time of the manifestation of the government of God would be at the judgment which Christ should execute. Meanwhile His walk on earth had furnished the pattern of that which the God of judgment approved (chap. 2:21-23; 4:1 following verses).

They were to do good, to suffer for it, and to be patient. This is well-pleasing to God; this is what Christ did. It was better that they should suffer for doing well, if God saw fit, than for doing ill. Christ (chap. 2:24) had borne our sins, had suffered for our sins, the Just for the unjust, in order that we, being dead to sins, should live for righteousness, and in order to bring us unto God Himself. Christ is now on high; He is ready to judge. When the judgment shall come, the principles of God's government will be manifested and shall prevail.

The beginning of chapter 4 requires some rather more detailed remarks. The death of Christ is there applied to practical death unto sins; a state presented in contrast with the life of the Gentiles.

Christ on the cross (the apostle alludes to verse 18 of the preceding chapter) suffered in the flesh for us. He died in fact as regards His human life. We must arm ourselves with the same mind, and allow of no activity of life or passions according to the will of the old man, but suffer as to the flesh, never yielding to its will. Sin is the action in us of the will of the flesh, the will of the man as alive in this world. When this will acts, the principle of sin is there; for we ought to obey. The will of God ought to be the spring of our moral life; and so much the more, because now that we have the knowledge of good and evil—now that the will of the flesh, unsubject to God, is in us, we must either take the will of God as our only motive, or act according to the will of the flesh, for the latter is always present in us.

Christ came to obey, He chose to die, to suffer all things rather than not obey. He thus died to sin, which never for a moment found an entrance into His heart. With Him, tempted to the uttermost, death was preferred rather than disobedience, even when death had the character of wrath against sin and judgment. Bitter as the cup was, He drank it rather than not fulfil to the uttermost His Father's will, and glorify Him. Tried to the uttermost and perfect in it, the temptation which ever assailed Him from without and sought entrance (for He had none within) was always kept outside; was never entered into, nor found a movement of His will towards it; drew out obedience, or the perfection of the divine thoughts in man; and by dying, by suffering in the flesh, He had done with it all, done with sin for ever, and entered for ever into rest, after having been tried to the uttermost, and tempted in all things similarly to us,121

as regards the trial of faith, the conflict of the spiritual life.

Now it is the same thing with respect to ourselves in daily life. If I suffer in the flesh, the will of the flesh is assuredly not in action; and the flesh, in that I suffer, is practically dead— I have nothing more to do with sins. 122 We then are freed from it, have done with it, and are at rest. If we are content to suffer, the will does not act; sin is not there, as to fact; for to suffer is not will, it is grace acting in accordance with the image and the mind of Christ in the new man; and we are freed from the action of the old man. It does not act; we rest from it; we have done with it, no longer to live, for the remainder of our life here below in the flesh, according to the lusts of man, but according to the will of God, which the new man follows.

It is enough to have spent the past time of our lives in doing the will of the Gentiles (he still speaks to Christians of the circumcision), and in committing the excesses to which they addicted themselves, while they wondered at Christians for refusing to do the same; speaking evil of them for this reason. But they would have to give account to Him, who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The Jews were accustomed to the judgment of the living, for they were the centre of God’s government on the earth. The judgment of the dead, with which we are more familiar, had not been definitely revealed to them. They were liable nevertheless to this judgment; for it was with this object that the promises of God were presented to them while living, in order that they might either live according to God in the spirit, or be judged as

men responsible for what they had done in the flesh. For the one or other of these results would be produced in every one who heard the promises. Thus, in regard to the Jews, the judgment of the dead would take place in connection with the promises that had been set before them. For this testimony from God placed all who heard it under responsibility, so that they would be judged as men who had to give account to God of their conduct in the flesh, unless they came out of this position of life in the flesh by being quickened through the power of the word addressed to them, applied by the energy of the Spirit; so that they escaped from the flesh through the spiritual life which they received.

Now the end of all things was at hand. The apostle, while speaking of the great principle of responsibility in connection with the testimony of God, draws the attention of believers to the solemn thought of the end of all these things on which the flesh rested. This end drew near.

Here, observe, Peter presents, not the coming of the Lord to receive His own, nor His manifestation with them, but that moment of the solemn sanction of the ways of God, when every refuge of the flesh shall disappear, and all the thoughts of man perish for ever.

As regards the relations of God with the world in government, the destruction of Jerusalem, although it was not “the end,” was of immense importance, because it destroyed the very seat of that government on the earth in which the Messiah ought to have reigned, and shall yet reign.

God watches over all things, takes care of His own, counts the hairs of their heads, makes everything

contribute to their highest good; but this is in the midst of a world which He no longer owns. For not only is the earthly and direct government of God set aside, which took place in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, and, in a certain sense, in those of Saul; but the Messiah, who ought to reign in it, has been rejected, and has taken the heavenly place in resurrection, which forms the subject of this epistle.

The destruction of Jerusalem (which was to take place in those days) was the final abolition of even the traces of that government, until the Lord shall return. The relations of an earthly people with God, on the ground of man's responsibility, were ended. The general government of God took the place of the former; a government always the same in principle, but which, Jesus having suffered on the earth, still allowed His members to suffer here below. And, until the time of judgment, the wicked will persecute the righteous, and the righteous must have patience. With regard to the nation, those relations only subsisted till the destruction of Jerusalem; the unbelieving hopes of the Jews, as a nation, were judicially overthrown. The apostle speaks here in a general way, and in view of the effect of the solemn truth of the end of all things, for Christ is still "ready to judge"; and if there is delay, it is because God wills not the death of the sinner, and that He prolongs the time of grace.

In view of this end of all that we see, we ought to be sober, and watch in order to pray. We ought to have the heart thus exercised towards God, who changes not, who will never pass away, and who preserves us through all the difficulties and temptations of this passing scene until the day of deliverance which is coming. Instead of

allowing ourselves to be carried away by present and visible things, we must bridle self and will, and commune with God.

This leads the apostle to the inner position of Christians, their relations among themselves, not with God's general government of the world. They follow, because they are Christians, Christ Himself. The first thing that he enforces on them is fervent charity; not merely long-suffering, which would prevent any outbreak of the anger of the flesh, but an energy of love, which by stamping its character on all the ways of Christians towards each other, would practically set aside the action of the flesh, and make manifest the divine presence and action.

Now this love covered a multitude of sins. He is not speaking here with a view to ultimate pardon, but of the present notice which God takes—His present relations of government with His people; for we have present relationships with God. If the assembly is at variance, if there is little love, if the intercourse among Christians is with straitened hearts and difficult, the existing evil, the mutual wrongs, subsist before God: but if there is love, which neither commits nor resents any wrongs, but pardons such things, and only finds in them occasion for its own exercise, it is then the love which the eye of God rests upon, and not the evil. Even if there are misdeeds —sins— love occupies itself about them, the offender is brought back, is restored, by the charity of the assembly; the sins are removed from the eye of God, they are covered. It is a quotation from the book of Proverbs 10:12: "Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth all sins." We have a right to forgive them —to wash the feet of our brother (compare James 5:15, and 1

John 5:16). We not only forgive, but love maintains the assembly before God according to His own nature so that He can bless it.

Christians ought to exercise hospitality towards each other with all liberality. It is the expression of love, and tends much to maintain it: we are no longer strangers to each other.

Gifts come next after the exercise of grace. All comes from God. As every one had received the gift, he was to serve in the gift, as a steward of the varied grace of God. It is God who gives; the Christian is a servant, and under responsibility as a steward, on God's part. He is to ascribe all to God, in a direct way to God. If he speaks, he is to speak as an oracle of God; that is, as speaking on God's part, and not from himself. If any one serves in things temporal, let him do it as in a power and an ability that come from God, so that, whether one speaks or serves, God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To Him, the apostle adds, be praise and dominion. Amen.

After these exhortations he comes to suffering for the name of Christ. They were not to view the fiery persecutions that came to try them, as some strange thing that had befallen them. On the contrary, they were connected with a suffering and rejected Christ; they partook therefore in His sufferings, and were to rejoice in it. He would soon appear, and these sufferings for His sake should turn to their exceeding joy at the revelation of His glory. They were therefore to rejoice at sharing His sufferings, in order to be filled with abounding joy when His glory should be revealed. If they were reproached for the name of Christ, it was happy for

them. The Spirit of God rested on them. It was the name of Christ that brought reproach on them. He was in the glory with God; the Spirit, who came from that glory and that God, filled them with joy in bearing the reproach. It was Christ who was reproached— Christ who was glorified—reproached by the enemies of the gospel, while Christians had the joy of glorifying Him. It will be observed, that in this passage, it is for Christ Himself (as it has been said) that the believer suffers; and, therefore, the apostle speaks of glory and joy at the appearing of Jesus Christ, which he does not mention in chapters 2:20; 3:17 (compare Matt. 5:10 and v. 11, 12 of the same chapter).

As an evil-doer then the Christian ought never to suffer; but if he suffered as a Christian, he was not to be ashamed, but to glorify God for it. The apostle then returns to the government of God; for these sufferings of believers had also another character. To the individual who suffered, it was a glory: he shared the sufferings of Christ, and the Spirit of glory and of God rested on him; and all this should turn to abounding joy when the glory was revealed. But God had no pleasure in allowing His people to suffer. He permitted it; and if Christ had to suffer for us when He who knew no sin did not need it for Himself, the people of God have often need on their own account to be exercised with suffering. God uses the wicked, the enemies of the name of Christ, for this purpose. Job is the book that explains this, independently of all dispensations. But in every form of God’s dealings, He exercises His judgments according to the order He has established. He did so with Israel; He does so with the assembly. The latter has a heavenly portion; and if she attaches herself to the earth, God

allows the enemy to trouble her. Perhaps the individual who suffers is full of faith and devoted love to the Lord; but, under persecution, the heart feels that the world is not its rest, that it must have its portion elsewhere, its strength elsewhere. We are not of the world which persecutes us. If the faithful servant of God is cut off from this world by persecution, it strengthens faith, for God is in it; but they from the midst of whom he is cut off, suffer and feel that the hand of God was in it: His dealings take the form of judgment, always in perfect love, but in discipline.

God judges everything according to His own nature. He desires that all should be in accordance with His nature. No upright and honourable man would like to have the wicked near him, and always before him; God assuredly would not. And in that which is nearest to Him, He must above all desire that everything should correspond to His nature and His holiness —to all that He is. I would have everything around me clean enough not to disgrace me; but in my own house I must have such cleanness as I personally desire. Thus judgment must begin at the house of God: the apostle alludes to Ezekiel 9:6. It is a solemn principle. No grace, no privilege, changes the nature of God; and everything must be conformed to that nature, or, in the end, must be banished from His presence. Grace can conform us, and it does. It bestows the divine nature, so that there is a principle of absolute conformity to God. But as to practical conformity in thought and deed, the heart and the conscience must be exercised, in order that the understanding of the heart, and the habitual desires and aspirations of the will, should be formed upon the revelation of God, and continually directed towards Him.

Now if this conformity should so fail that the testimony of God is injured by its absence, God, who judges His people, and who will judge evil everywhere, does so by means of the chastisements which He inflicts. Judgment begins at the house of God. The righteous are saved with difficulty. It is evidently not redemption or justification that is here intended, nor the communication of life: those whom the apostle addresses were in possession of them. To our apostle “salvation” is not only the present enjoyment of the salvation of the soul, but the full deliverance of the faithful, which will take place at the coming of Christ in glory. All the temptations are contemplated, all the trials, all the dangers, through which the Christian will pass in reaching the end of his career. All the power of God is requisite, directed by divine wisdom, guiding and sustaining faith, to carry the Christian safely through the wilderness, where Satan employs all the resources of his subtlety to make him perish. The power of God will accomplish it; but, from the human point of view, the difficulties are almost insurmountable. Now, if the righteous—according to the ways of God, who must maintain His judgment conformable to the principles of good and evil in His government; and who will in nowise deny Himself in dealing with the enemy of our souls—if the righteous were saved with difficulty, what would become of the sinner and the ungodly? To join them would not be the way to escape these difficulties. In suffering as a Christian, there was but one thing to do—to commit oneself to Him who watched over the judgment that He was executing. For, as it was His hand, one suffered according to His will. It was this that Christ did.

Observe here, that it is not only the government of God, but there is the expression, “as unto a faithful Creator.” The Spirit of God moves here in this sphere. It is the relationship of God with this world, and the soul knows Him as the One who created it, and who does not forsake the work of His hands. This is Jewish ground—God known in His connection with the first creation. Trust in Him is founded on Christ; but God is known in His ways with this world, and with us in our pilgrimage here below, where He governs, and where He judges Christians, as He will judge all others.

Chapter 5. The apostle returns to christian details. He exhorts the elders, himself an elder; for it appears that among the Jews this title was rather characteristic than official (compare v. 5). He exhorts them to feed the flock of God. The apostle designates himself as one who had been a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and who was to be a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. It was the function of the twelve to be witnesses of the life of Christ (John 15), as it was that of the Holy Ghost to testify of His heavenly glory. Peter places himself at the two ends of the Lord’s history, and leaves the interval devoid of all except hope, and the pilgrimage towards an end. He had seen the sufferings of Christ; he was to share His glory when he should be revealed. It is a Christ who puts Himself in relation with the Jews, now known only by faith. During His life on earth, He was in the midst of the Jews, although suffering there and rejected. When He shall appear, He will again be in relation with the earth and with that nation.

Paul speaks differently, while at the same time confirming these truths. He only knew the Lord after His exaltation; he is not a witness of His sufferings; but he

seeks for the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul's heart is bound to Christ while He is in heaven, as united to Him above; and, although he desires the Lord's appearing, for the restitution of all things of which the prophets had spoken, he rejoices to know that he shall go with joy to meet Him, and shall return with Him when He is revealed from heaven.

The elders were to feed the flock of God with a ready mind, and not as by constraint, nor for gain, nor as governing an inheritance of their own, but as ensamples to the flock. Loving care was to be lavished upon it, for the sake of Christ, the chief Shepherd, with a view to the good of souls. Moreover it was the flock of God which they were to feed. What a solemn as well as sweet thought! How impossible for anyone to entertain the notion of its being his flock, if he has laid hold of the thought that it is the flock of God, and that God allows us to feed it!

We may observe that the heart of the blessed apostle is where the Lord had placed it. "Feed my sheep "was the expression of the Lord's perfect grace towards Peter, when He was leading him to the humiliating but salutary confession that it needed the eye of God to see that His weak disciple loved Him. At the moment that He convinced him of his utter nothingness, He entrusted to him that which was dearest to Himself.

Thus we see, here, that it is the apostle's care, the desire of the heart, that they should feed the flock. Here, as elsewhere, he does not go beyond the Lord's appearing. It is at that period that the ways of God in government—of which the Jews were the earthly centre

—shall be fully manifested. Then shall the crown of glory be presented to him that has been faithful, that has satisfied the chief Shepherd's heart.

The young were to submit themselves to those who were older, and all to one another. All were to be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. These are still the principles of His government. Under His hand they were therefore to humble themselves; they should be exalted in due time. This was to commit themselves to God. He knew what was needful. He who loved them would exalt them at the right time. He cared for them; they were to rest on Him, commit all their cares to Him.

On the other hand, they were to be sober and vigilant, because the adversary sought to devour them. Here—whatever may be his wiles, however he may lie in wait for Christians —it is in the character of a roaring lion, one who excites open persecution, that the apostle presents him. They were to resist him, stedfast in the faith. Everywhere the same afflictions were found. Nevertheless the God of grace is the Christian's confidence. He has called us to participate in His eternal glory. The apostle's desire for them is, that, after they had suffered for a time, the God of grace should make them perfect, complete—should stablish and strengthen them, building up their hearts on the foundation of an assurance that cannot be shaken. To Him, he adds, be glory and dominion.

We see that the Christians to whom he wrote were suffering, and that the apostle explained these sufferings on the principles of the divine government, with regard especially to the relation of Christians with God, as

being His house, whether those sufferings were for righteousness' sake, or for the name of the Lord. It was but for a time. The Christian's hope was elsewhere; christian patience was well-pleasing to God. It was their glory, if it was for the name of Christ. Besides which, God judged His house, and watched over His people.

116 I add "on earth "here, because the assembly, as built by Jesus Himself and not yet finished, is spoken of in chapter 2, where the living stones come to Christ.

117 The doctrine of the gathering together of the saints to Jesus in the air, when they go to meet Him, forms no part of Peter's teaching, any more than does that of the assembly on earth with which it is connected. He speaks of the manifestation of the saints in glory, because he is occupied with the ways of God towards the earth, although he is so in connection with Christianity.

118 See 2 Thessalonians 1: 9, 10.

119 In this passage, so to speak (as in this alone), Peter meets the doctrine of the assembly, and that under the character of a building, not of a body or a bride; that which Christ built, not what was united to Him. So Paul also presents it to us in Ephesians 2:20, 21. In this view, though going on on earth, it is Christ's work and a continuing process; no human instrumentality is referred to: I will build, says Christ; it grows, says Paul; living stones come, says Peter. This must not be confounded with the building into which men may build wood and hay and stubble, as the same thing; though the outward thing which God set up good, left to man's responsibility, as ever, was soon corrupted. Individuals are built up by grace, and it grows into a holy temple. All this refers to Matthew 16. The responsibility of

human service in this respect is found in 1 Corinthians 3, and the assembly is there given in another point of view. The body is another thing altogether; the doctrine is taught in Ephesians 1-4; 1 Corinthians 12, and other passages.

120 An allusion, I suppose, to the last verse of Psalm 119. The apostle constantly puts the christian Jews on the ground of the blessed remnant, only making it a soul salvation.

121 It is not, as in the Authorised Version, “yet without sin,” true as that may be, but “sin apart.” We are tempted, being led away by our own lusts. Christ had all our difficulties, all our temptations, on the way, but had nothing in Himself which could lead Him wrong—far surely from it—nothing which answered to the temptation.

122 Peter rests on the effect; Paul, as ever, goes to the root, Romans 6.

2 Peter

The second epistle of Peter is even more simple than the first. Like those of Jude and John, it is written essentially with a view to the seducers, who, with large promises of liberty, beguiled souls into sin and licentiousness, denying the coming of Christ, and in fact disowning all His rights over them. The epistle admonishes the same Christians to whom the first was written, pointing out the characteristic features of these false teachers; denouncing them with the utmost energy; explaining the long-sufferance of God, and announcing a judgment which, like His patience, would befit the majesty of Him who was to execute it.

But before giving these warnings, which begin with chapter 2, the apostle exhorts Christians to make their own calling and election sure—not evidently in the heart of God, but as a fact in their own hearts, and in practical life, by walking in such a manner as not to stumble; so that testimony to their portion in Christ should be always evident, and an abundant entrance be ministered to them.

These exhortations are founded, firstly, on that which is already given to Christians; secondly, on that which is future— namely, the manifestation of the glory of the kingdom. In touching upon this last subject, he indicates a still more excellent portion—the bright morning star, the heavenly Christ Himself and our association with Him before He appears as the Sun of righteousness. Thirdly, we shall see that the warnings are founded also on another basis—namely, the dissolution of the heavens and the earth, proving the instability of all that unbelief

rested upon, and furnishing for the same reason a solemn warning to the saints to induce them to walk in holiness.

The apostle described his brethren as having obtained the same precious faith as himself through the faithfulness of God123 to the promises made to the fathers, for that surely is the force of the word “righteousness “in this place. The faithfulness of the God of Israel had bestowed on His people this faith (that is to say, Christianity), which was so precious to them.

Faith here is the portion we have now in the things that God gives, which in Christianity are revealed as truths, while the things promised are not yet come. It was in this way that the believing Jews were to possess the Messiah, and all that God gave in Him, as the Lord had said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. There are many mansions in my Father’s house; I go to prepare a place for you.” That is to say, “You do not visibly possess God; you enjoy Him by believing in Him. It is the same with respect to Me: you will not possess Me corporeally, but you shall enjoy all that is in Me—righteousness, and all the promises of God—by believing.” It was thus that these believing Jews, to whom Peter wrote, possessed the Lord: they had received this precious faith.

He wishes them, as is the custom, “Grace and peace,” adding,” through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” It is the knowledge of God and of Jesus, which is the centre and the support of faith, that which nourishes it, and in which it is developed and divinely enlarged, and which guards it from the vain imaginings of seducers. But there is a living power with this

knowledge—a divine power in that which God is to believers—as He is revealed in this knowledge to faith; and this divine power has given to us all that pertains to life and godliness. By the realising knowledge which we possess of Him who has called us, this divine power becomes available and efficacious for all that appertains to life and godliness—"the knowledge of him who hath called us by glory and by virtue."

Thus we have here, the call of God to pursue glory as our object, gaining the victory by virtue—spiritual courage—over all the enemies that we find in our path. It is not a law given to a people already gathered together, but glory proposed in order to be reached by spiritual energy. Moreover we have divine power acting according to its own efficacy, for the life of God in us, and for godliness.

How precious it is to know that faith can use this divine power, realised in the life of the soul, directing it towards glory as its end! What a safeguard from the efforts of the enemy, if we are really established in the consciousness of this divine power acting on our behalf in grace! The heart is led to make glory its object; and virtue, the strength of spiritual life, is developed on the way to it. Divine power has given us all needed.

Now, in connection with these two things—namely, with glory and with the energy of life—very great and precious promises are given us; for all the promises in Christ are developed either in the glory, or in the life which leads to it. By means of these promises, we are made partakers of the divine nature; for this divine power, which is realised in life and godliness, is connected with these great and precious promises that

relate either to the glory, or to virtue in the life that leads to it—that is to say, it is divine power which develops itself, in realising the glory and heavenly walk which characterises it in its own nature. We are thus made morally partakers of the divine nature, by divine power acting in us and fixing the soul on what is divinely revealed. Precious truth! Privilege so exalted! and which renders us capable of enjoying God Himself, as well as all good.

By the same action of this divine power, we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; for the divine power delivers us from it. Not only do we not yield to it, but we are occupied elsewhere, and the action of the enemy upon the flesh is kept off"; the desires from which one could not cleanse oneself are removed; the corrupt relationship of the heart with its object ceases. It is a real deliverance; we have the mastery over ourselves in this respect; we are set free from sin.

But it is not enough to have escaped by faith from even the inward dominion of the desires of the flesh; we must add to faith—to that faith which realises divine power, and the glory of Christ that shall be revealed—we must add to faith, virtue. This is the first thing. It is, as we have said, the moral courage which overcomes difficulties, and governs the heart by curbing all action of the old nature. It is an energy by which the heart is master of itself, and is able to choose the good, and to cast aside the evil, as a thing conquered and unworthy of oneself. This indeed is grace; but the apostle is here speaking of the thing itself, as it is realised in the heart, and not of its source. I have said that this is the first thing; because, practically, this self-government—this

virtue, this moral energy—is deliverance from evil, and renders communion with God possible. It is the one thing which gives reality to all the rest, for without virtue we are not really with God. Can divine power develop itself in the laxity of the flesh? And if we are not really with God—if the new nature is not acting—knowledge is but the puffing up of the flesh; patience but a natural quality, or else hypocrisy; and so on with the rest. But where there is this virtue, it is very precious to add knowledge to it. We have then divine wisdom and intelligence to guide our walk: the heart is enlarged, sanctified, spiritually developed, by a more complete and profound acquaintance with God, who acts in the heart and is reflected in the walk. We are guarded from more errors—we are more humble, more sober-minded: we know better where our treasure is, and what it is, and that everything else is but vanity and a hindrance. It is therefore a true knowledge of God that is here meant.

Thus walking in the knowledge of God, the flesh, the will, the desires, are bridled; all their practical power diminishes, and they disappear as habits of the soul; they are not fed. We are moderate; there is self-restraint; we do not give way to our desires; temperance is added to knowledge. The apostle is not speaking of the walk, but of the state of the heart in the walk. Still, being thus governed, and the wall bridled, one bears patiently with others; and the circumstances that must be passed through are, in all respects, borne according to the will of God, be they what they may. We add patience to temperance. The heart, the spiritual life, is then free to enjoy its true objects—a principle of deep importance in the christian life. When the flesh is at

work in one way or another (even if its action is purely inward), if there is anything whatever that the conscience ought to be exercised about, the soul cannot be in the enjoyment of communion with God in the light, because the effect of the light is then to bring the conscience into exercise. But when the conscience has nothing that is not already judged in the light, the new man is in action with regard to God, whether in realising the joy of His presence or in glorifying Him in a life characterised by godliness. We enjoy communion with God; we walk with God; we add to patience godliness.

The heart being thus in communion with God, affection flows out freely towards those who are dear to Him, and who, sharing the same nature, necessarily draw out the affections of the spiritual heart: brotherly love is developed.

There is another principle, which crowns and governs and gives character to all others: it is charity, love properly so called. This, in its root, is the nature of God Himself, the source and perfection of every other quality that adorns christian life. The distinction between love and brotherly love is of deep importance; the former is indeed, as we have just said, the source whence the latter flows; but as this brotherly love exists in mortal men, it may be mingled in its exercise with sentiments that are merely human, with individual affection, with the effect of personal attractions, or that of habit, of suitability in natural character. Nothing is sweeter than brotherly affections; their maintenance is of the highest importance in the assembly; but they may degenerate, as they may grow cool; and if love, if God, does not hold the chief place, they may displace Him—set Him aside—shut Him out. Divine love, which is the very nature of

God, directs, rules, and gives character to brotherly love; otherwise it is that which pleases us—that is, our own heart—that governs us. If divine love governs me, I love all my brethren; I love them because they belong to Christ; there is no partiality. I shall have greater enjoyment in a spiritual brother; but I shall occupy myself about my weak brother with a love that rises above his weakness and has tender consideration for it. I shall concern myself with my brother's sin, from love to God, in order to restore my brother, rebuking him, if needful; nor, if divine love be in exercise, can brotherly love, or its name, be associated with disobedience. In a word, God will have His place in all my relationships. To exact brotherly love in such a manner as to shut out the requirements of that which God is, and of His claims upon us, is to shut out God in the most plausible way, in order to gratify our own hearts. Divine love then, which acts according to the nature, character, and will of God, is that which ought to direct and characterise our whole christian walk, and have authority over every movement of our hearts. Without this, all that brotherly love can do is to substitute man for God. Divine love is the bond of perfectness, for it is God, who is love, working in us and making Himself the governing object of all that passes in the heart.

Now, if these things are in us, the knowledge of Jesus will not be barren in our hearts. But if, on the contrary, they are wanting, we are blind; we cannot see far into the things of God; our view is contracted; it is limited by the narrowness of a heart governed by its own will, and turned aside by its own lusts. We forget that we have been cleansed from our old sins; we lose sight of the position Christianity has given us. This state of things is

not the loss of assurance, but the forgetfulness of the true christian profession into which we are brought—purity in contrast with the ways of the world.

Therefore we ought to use diligence, in order to have the consciousness of our election fresh and strong, so as to walk in spiritual liberty. Thus doing, we shall not stumble; and thus an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom will be our portion. Here, as throughout, we see that the apostle's mind is occupied with the government of God, applying it to His dealing with believers, in reference to their conduct and its practical consequences. He is not speaking in an absolute way of pardon and salvation, but of the kingdom—of the manifestation of His power who judges righteously—whose sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness. Walking in the ways of God, we have part in that kingdom, entering into it with assurance, without difficulty, without that hesitation of soul which is experienced by those who grieve the Holy Ghost, and get a bad conscience, and allow themselves in things that do not accord with the character of the kingdom, or who shew by their negligence that their heart is not in it. If on the contrary the heart cleaves to the kingdom, and our ways are suitable to it, our conscience is in unison with its glory. The way is open before us: we see into the distance, and we go forward, having no impediments in our way. Nothing turns us aside as we walk in the path that leads to the kingdom, occupied with things suitable to it. God has no controversy with one who walks thus. The entrance into the kingdom is widely opened to him according to the ways of God in government.

The apostle desires, therefore, to remind them of these things, although they knew them, purposing, so long as

he was in his earthly tabernacle, to stir up their pure hearts to keep them in remembrance; for soon would he have laid aside his earthly vessel, as the Lord had told him, and by thus writing to them, he took care that they should always bear them in mind.

It is very plain that he was not expecting other apostles to be raised up, nor an ecclesiastical succession to take their place as guardians of the faith, or as possessing sufficient authority to be a foundation for the faith of believers. He was to provide for this himself, in order that, on his removal, they might find something on his part that would remind the faithful of the instructions he had given them. For this purpose he wrote his epistle.

The divine importance and certainty of that which he taught were worthy of this labour. We have not, says the apostle, followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty.

The apostle is speaking, as his words plainly shew, of the transfiguration. I notice it here, in order to mark more evidently that in his thoughts of the Lord's coming he does not go beyond His appearing in glory. For the moment He was hidden from those who trusted in Him: this was a great trial of their faith, for the Jews were accustomed, as we know, to look for a visible and glorious Messiah. To believe without seeing was the lesson they had to learn; and it was a magnificent support to their faith, this fact, that the apostle, who taught them, had, with his two companions, seen, with their own eyes, the glory of Christ manifested—had seen it displayed before them, together with that of former saints who share His kingdom. At that time Jesus

received, in testimony from God the Father, honour and glory; a voice addressing Him from the excellent glory—from the cloud, which was to a Jew the well-known dwelling-place of Jehovah the Most High God—owning Him as His well-beloved Son; a voice which the three apostles also heard (even as they saw His glory), when they were with Him on the holy mount.124 We see that it is here the glory of the kingdom, and not the dwelling in the Father's house for ever with the Lord, which occupies the apostle. It is a manifestation to men living on the earth; it is the power of the Lord, the glory which He receives from God the Father as the Messiah, acknowledged to be His Son, and crowned with glory and honour before the eyes of the world. It is into the everlasting kingdom that the apostle wishes them to have an enlarged entrance. It is the power and glory that Christ received from God, which the apostle saw, and to which he bears testimony. We shall indeed have this glory, but it is not our portion, properly so called: for this is within the house, to be the bride of the Lamb, and it does not display itself to the world. With regard however to the assembly the two things cannot be separated; if we are the bride, we shall assuredly participate in the glory of the kingdom.125 To the Jew, who was accustomed to look for this glory (whatever might be his idea respecting it), the fact of the apostle's having seen it was of inestimable importance. It was the heavenly glory of the kingdom, as it shall be manifested to the world; a glory that shall be seen when the Lord returns in power (compare Mark 9:1). It is a communicated glory which comes from the excellent glory. Moreover the testimony of the prophets relates to the manifested glory; they spoke of the kingdom and glory, and the brightness of the transfiguration was a

splendid confirmation of their words. We have, says the apostle, the words of the prophets confirmed. Those words proclaimed indeed the glory of the kingdom which was to come, and the judgment of the world, which was to make way for its establishment on earth. This announcement was a light in the darkness of our world, truly a dark place, that had no other light than the testimony which God had given, through the prophets, of that which shall happen to it, and of the future kingdom whose light shall finally dispel the darkness of separation from God in which the world lies. Prophecy was a light that shone during the darkness of the night; but there was another light for those that watched.

For the remnant of the Jews, the Sun of righteousness should rise with healing in His wings; the wicked should be trodden as ashes under the feet of the righteous. The Christian, instructed in his own privileges, knows the Lord in a different way from this, although he believes in those solemn truths. He watches during the night, which is already far spent. He sees in his heart, by faith,126 the dawn of day, and the rising of the bright star of the morning. He knows the Lord as they know Him who believe in Him before He is manifested, as coming for the pure heavenly joy of His own before the brightness of the day shines forth. They who watch see the dawn of day; they see the morning star. Thus we have our portion in Christ not only in the day, and as the prophets spoke of Him, which all relates to the earth, although the blessing comes from on high; we have the secret of Christ and of our union with Him, and of His coming to receive us to Himself as the morning star, before the day comes. We are His during the night; we shall be with

Him in the truth of that heavenly bond which unites us to Him, as set apart for Himself while the world does not see Him. We shall be gathered to Him, before the world sees Him, that we may enjoy Himself, and in order that the world may see us with Him when He appears.

The joy of our portion is, that we shall be with Himself, "for ever with the Lord." Prophecy enlightens the Christian, and separates him from the world, by testimony to its judgment, and the glory of the coming kingdom. The testimony of the Spirit to the assembly does this, by the attraction of Christ Himself, the bright morning star—our portion while the world is still buried in sleep.

The bright morning star is Christ Himself, when (before the day, which will be produced by His appearing) He is ready to receive the assembly, that she may enter into His own peculiar joy. Thus it is said, "I am the bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16). This is what He is for the assembly, as He is the root and offspring of David for Israel. Consequently, as soon as He says "the morning star," the Spirit, who dwells in the assembly and inspires her thoughts, and the bride, the assembly itself which waits for her Lord, say, "Come!" Thus, in Revelation 2:28, the faithful in Thyatira are promised by the Lord that He will give them the morning star; that is to say, joy with Himself in heaven. The kingdom and the power had been already promised them according to Christ's own rights (v. 26, 27); but the assembly's proper portion is Christ Himself. In addition to the declaration of the prophets, with regard to the kingdom, it is thus that the assembly expects Him.

The apostle goes on to warn the faithful, that the prophecies of scripture were not like the utterances of human will, and were not to be interpreted as though each had a separate solution— as though every prophecy were sufficient to itself for the explanation of its full meaning. They were all parts of one whole, having one and the same object, even the kingdom of God; and each event was a preliminary step towards this object, and a link in the chain of God's government which led to it, impossible to be explained, unless the aim of the whole were apprehended —the revealed aim of the counsels of God in the glory of His Christ. For holy men, moved by the Holy Ghost, pronounced these oracles, one and the same Spirit directing and co-ordaining the whole for the development of the ways of God to the eye of faith, ways which would terminate in the establishment of that kingdom, the glory of which had appeared at the transfiguration.

Thus we have here (chap. 1) these three things:—Firstly, divine power for all that appertains to life and godliness, a declaration of infinite value, the pledge of our true liberty. Divine power acts in us, it gives to us all needed to enable us to walk in the christian life.

Secondly, there is the government of God, in connection with the faithfulness of the believer, in order that a wide and abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom may be granted us, and that we may not stumble. The great result of this government will be manifested in the establishment of the kingdom, the glory of which was seen on the holy mount by the three apostles.

But, thirdly, for the Christian there was something better than the kingdom, something to which the apostle

merely alludes, for it was not the especial subject of the communications of the Holy Ghost to him as it was to the Apostle Paul, namely, Christ taking the assembly to Himself, a point not found either in the promises or the prophecies, but which forms the precious and inestimable joy and hope of the Christian taught of God.

This first chapter has thus taught us the divine aspect of the christian position, given to the apostle for the instruction, in the last days, of believers from among the circumcision. The next two chapters set before us, on the other hand, the two forms of evil that characterise the last days—the false and corrupt teaching of bad men, and the unbelief which denies the return of the Lord on the ground of the stability of the visible creation. The former really denies the Master who bought them. It is no question here as to the title of the Lord, nor of redemption. The simile is of a master who has purchased slaves at the market, and they disown and refuse to obey him. Thus among the converted Jews there would be false teachers, who disowned the authority of Christ—His rights over them. Many would be led away by them; and as they bore the name of Christians, the way of truth would be brought into disrepute by their means; while in fact, by their covetousness and hypocritical words, they would make merchandise of Christians for their private gain, count them as mere instruments of it. But the resource of faith is always in God. Judgment would overtake them. The examples of the fallen angels, of Noah and the deluge, of Lot and Sodom, proved that the Lord knew how to deliver the righteous out of their trials, and to reserve the unrighteous for the day of judgment.

That which would characterise this class of evildoers would be the unbridled license of their conduct. They would indulge their carnal lusts, and despise all authority in a way that angels would not dare to do. Still they would call themselves Christians and associate with Christians in their love-feasts, deceiving their own hearts, addicting themselves continually to evil, promising liberty to others, but themselves the slaves of corruption.

Now, to be thus re-entangled in evil, after having escaped it through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, was worse than if they had never known anything of the way of truth. But it was according to the true proverb—The dog had returned to his own vomit, and the sow that had been washed, to her wallowing in the mire. They were apostates therefore; but here the Spirit of God does not so much point out the apostasy as the evil, because the government of God is still in view. In Jude the apostasy is the prominent thing. Peter tells us that the angels sinned; Jude, that they kept not their first estate. But God will judge the wicked.

In the last chapter, as we have said, it is materialism: trust in the stability of that which can be seen, in contrast with trust in the word of God which teaches us to look for the coming of Jesus, the return of the Lord. They judge by their senses. There is, say they, no appearance of change. This is not the case. To the eye of man it is indeed true that there is none. But these unbelievers are wilfully ignorant of the fact that the world has been already judged once; that the waters, out of which by the mighty word of God the earth came, had for the moment swallowed it up again, all perishing except those whom God preserved in the ark. And by the

same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. It is not that the Lord is slack concerning the promise of His return, but that He is still exercising grace, not wishing any to perish, but that all should come to repentance. And a thousand years are to Him but as a day, and a day as a thousand years. But the day of the Lord shall come, in which all things will pass away, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and all that is on the earth will be consumed. Solemn consideration for the children of God, to maintain them in complete separation from evil, and from all that is seen, looking for and hastening the day in which the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat! Everything on which the hopes of the flesh are founded shall disappear for ever.

Nevertheless, there shall be new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell. It is not here said, “shall reign” which would be the thousand years of the Lord’s dominion; here it is the eternal state, in which the government, that has brought all things into order, will terminate, and unhindered blessing will flow from God, the kingdom being given up to God the Father.

It is in following out the ways of God in government that the apostle carries them on to the eternal state, in which the promise will be finally accomplished. The millennium itself was the restitution, of which the prophets had spoken; and, morally, the heavens and the earth had been changed by the imprisonment of Satan and the reign of Christ (see Isaiah 65:17, 18, Jerusalem having been made a rejoicing); and the heavens indeed entirely cleared by power, never to be defiled by Satan again, the saints on high too in their eternal state, the earth

delivered, but not yet finally freed. But, materially, the dissolution of the elements was necessary for the renewal of all things.

It will be observed, that the Spirit does not speak here of the coming of Christ, except to say that it will be scoffed at in the last days. He speaks of the day of God, in contrast with the trust of unbelievers in the stability of the material things of creation, which depends, as the apostle shews, on the word of God. And in that day everything on which unbelievers rested and will rest shall be dissolved and pass away. This will not be at the commencement of the day, but at its close; and here we are free to reckon this day, according to the apostle's word, as a thousand years, or whatever length of period the Lord shall see fit.

So solemn a dissolution of all that the flesh rests upon should lead us so to walk as to be found of the Lord, when He comes to introduce that day, in peace and blameless; accounting that the apparent delay is only the Lord's grace, exercised for the salvation of souls. We may well wait, if God makes use of this time to rescue souls from judgment, by bringing them to the knowledge of Himself, and saving them with an everlasting salvation. This, the apostle says, had been taught by Paul, who wrote to them (the Hebrew believers) of these things, as he did also in his other epistles.

It is interesting to see that Peter, who had been openly rebuked before all by Paul, introduces him here with entire affection. He notices that Paul's epistles contained an exalted doctrine, which they who were unstable, and not taught of God, perverted. For Peter in fact does not follow Paul in the field on which the latter

had entered. This however does not prevent his speaking of Paul's writings as forming a part of the scriptures; "as also the other scriptures," he says. This is an important testimony; which moreover gives the same character to the writings of one who is able to bestow this title on the writings of another.

Let Christians then be watchful, and not allow themselves to be seduced by the errors of the wicked, but strive to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen!

123 This passage may be translated "of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ,' and perhaps ought to be so rendered since it speaks of the faithfulness of God to His promise. The epistle to the Hebrews dwells also on the fact that Jesus is Jehovah.

124 In Luke 9 the higher part of the blessing is brought before us. They feared when they entered into the cloud. God had talked with Moses from the cloud face to face, but here they enter into it. The heavenly and eternal character, what is perpetual as moral, is much more brought out in Luke.

125 Compare Luke 12, where the joy within the house is connected with watching; the inheritance with service.

126 This is the construction of the sentence: "We have also the prophetic word confirmed, in giving heed to which ye do well (as to a light shining in a dark place), until the day shall dawn, and the morning star arise, in your hearts."

1 John

The epistle of John has a peculiar character. It is eternal life manifested in. Jesus, and imparted to us—the life which was with the Father, and which is in the Son. It is in this life that believers enjoy the communion of the Father, that they are in relationship with the Father by the Spirit of adoption, and that they have fellowship with the Father and the Son. God’s own character is that which tests it; because it proceeds from Himself.

The first chapter establishes these two latter points: namely, communion with the Father and the Son, and that this communion must be according to the essential character of God. The name of Father is that which gives character to the second chapter. Afterwards it is that which God is, which tests the reality of imparted life.

The epistles of Paul, although speaking of this life, are in general occupied with setting before Christians the truth respecting the means of standing in the presence of God justified and accepted. The epistle of John, that is to say, his first, shews us the life that comes from God by Jesus Christ. John sets God before us, the Father revealed in the Son, and eternal life in Him. Paul sets us before God accepted in Christ. I speak of what characterises them. Each respectively touches on the other point.

Now, this fife is so precious, manifested as it is in the Person of Jesus, that the epistle now before us has in this respect quite a peculiar charm. When I, too, turn my eyes to Jesus, when I contemplate all His obedience, His purity. His grace, His tenderness, His patience, His

devotedness, His holiness, His love, His entire freedom from all self-seeking, I can say, That is my life.

This is immeasurable grace. It may be that it is obscured in me; but it is none the less true, that that is my life. Oh how do I enjoy it thus seen! How I bless God for it! What rest to the soul! What pure joy to the heart! At the same time Jesus Himself is the object of my affections; and all my affections are formed on that holy object.127 But we must turn to our epistle. There were many pretensions to new light, to clearer views. It was said that Christianity was very good as an elementary thing; but that it was grown old, and that there was a new light which went far beyond that twilight truth.

The Person of our Lord, the true manifestation of the divine life itself, dissipated all those proud pretensions, those exaltations of the human mind under the influence of the enemy, which did but obscure the truth, and lead the mind of men back into the darkness whence they themselves proceeded.

That which was from the beginning (of Christianity; that is, in the Person of Christ), that which they had heard, had seen with their own eyes, had contemplated, had touched with their own hands, of the Word of life—that was it which the apostle declared. For the life itself had been manifested. That life which was with the Father had been manifested to the disciples. Could there be anything more perfect, more excellent, any development more admirable in the eyes of God, than Christ Himself, than that Life which was with the Father, manifested in all its perfection in the Person of the Son? As soon as the Person of the Son is the object of our faith, we feel that perfection must have been at the beginning. The Person

then of the Son, the eternal life manifested in the flesh, is our subject in this epistle.

Grace is consequently to be remarked here in that which regards life; while Paul presents it in connection with justification. The law promised life upon obedience; but life came in the Person of Jesus, in all its own divine perfection, in its human manifestations. Oh how precious is the truth that this life, such as it was with the Father, such as it was in Jesus, is given to us! In what relationships it sets us, by the power of the Holy Ghost, with the Father and with the Son Himself! And this is what the Spirit here first sets before us. And observe, how it is all grace here. Farther on, indeed, He tests all pretensions to the possession of fellowship with God, by displaying God's own character; a character from which He can never deviate. But, before entering on this, He presents the Saviour Himself, and communion with the Father and the Son by this means, without question and without modification. This is our position and our eternal joy.

The apostle had seen that life, had touched it with his own hands; and he wrote to others, proclaiming this, in order that they also should have communion with him in the knowledge of the life which had been thus manifested.128 Now, inasmuch as that life was the Son, it could not be known without knowing the Son; that is, that which He was, entering into His thoughts, His feelings: otherwise He is not really known. It was thus they had communion with Him—with the Son. Precious fact! to enter into the thoughts (all the thoughts), and into the feelings, of the Son of God come down in grace: to do this in fellowship with Him; that is to say, not only

knowing them, but sharing these thoughts and feelings with Him. In effect, it is the life.

But we cannot have the Son without having the Father. He who had seen Him had seen the Father; and consequently he who had communion with the Son had communion with the Father; for their thoughts and feelings were all one. He is in the Father, and the Father in Him. We have fellowship therefore with the Father. And this is true also, when we look at it in another aspect. We know that the Father has entire delight in the Son. Now He has given us, by revealing the Son, to take our delight in Him also, feeble as we are. I know, when I am delighting in Jesus—in His obedience, His love to His Father, to us, His single eye and purely devoted heart— I have the same feelings, the same thoughts, as the Father Himself. In that the Father delights, cannot but delight, in Him in whom I now delight, I have communion with the Father. So with the Son in the knowledge of the Father. All this flows, whether in the one or the other point of view, from the Person of the Son. Herein our joy is full. What can we have more than the Father and the Son? What more perfect happiness than community of thoughts, feelings, joys, and communion, with the Father and the Son, deriving all our joy from themselves? And if it seem difficult to believe, let us remember that, in truth, it cannot be otherwise: for, in the life of Christ, the Holy Ghost is the source of my thoughts, feelings, communion, and He cannot give thoughts different from those of the Father and the Son. They must be in their nature the same. To say that they are adoring thoughts is in the very nature of things, and only makes them more precious. To say that they are feeble and often hindered, while the Father

and the Son are divine and perfect, is, if true, to say the Father and the Son are God, are divine, and we feeble creatures. That surely none will deny. But if the blessed Spirit be the source, they must be the same as to nature and fact.

This is our christian position then, here below in time, through the knowledge of the Son of God; as the apostle says, “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” But He who was the life which came from the Father, has brought us the knowledge of God.129 The apostle had heard from His lips that which God was—knowledge of priceless value, but which searches the heart. And this also the apostle, on the Lord’s part, announces to believers. This then is the message which they had heard from Him, namely, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness. With regard to Christ, He spoke that which He knew, and bore testimony to that which He had seen. No one had been in heaven, save He who came down from thence. No one had seen God. The Only-begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, He had declared Him. No one had seen the Father, save He who was of God; He had seen the Father. Thus He could, of His own and perfect knowledge, reveal Him.130 Now God was light, perfect purity, which makes manifest at the same time all that is pure, and all that is not so. To have communion with light, one must oneself be light, be of its nature, and fit to be seen in the perfect light. It can only be linked with that which is of itself. If there is anything else that mingles with it, light is no longer light. It is absolute in its nature, so as to exclude all that is not itself.

Therefore, if we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practise truth:

our life is a perpetual lie. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we (believers) have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. These are the great principles, the great features of christian position. We are in the presence of God without a veil. It is a real thing, a matter of life and of walk. It is not the same thing as walking according to the light; but it is in the light. That is to say, that this walk is before the eyes of God, enlightened by the full revelation of what He is. It is not that there is no sin in us; but, walking in the light, the will and the conscience being in the light as God is in it, everything is judged that does not answer to it. We live and walk morally in the sense that God is present, and as knowing Him. We walk thus in the light. The moral rule of our will is God Himself, God known. The thoughts that sway the heart come from Himself and are formed upon the revelation of Himself. The apostle puts these things always in an abstract way: thus he says, “he cannot sin, because he is born of God”; and that maintains the moral rule of this life; it is its nature; it is the truth, inasmuch as the man is born of God. We cannot have any other measure of it: any other would be false. It does not follow, alas! that we are always consistent; but we are inconsistent if we are not in this state; we are not walking according to the nature that we possess; we are out of our true condition according to that nature.

Moreover, walking in the light, as God is in the light, believers have communion with each other. The word is selfish. The flesh, the passions, seek their own gratification; but, if I walk in the light, self has no place there. I can enjoy the light, and all I seek in it, with another, and there is no jealousy. If another possess a

carnal thing, I am deprived of it. In the light we have fellow-possession of that which He gives us, and we enjoy it the more by sharing it together. This is a touchstone to all that is of the flesh. As much as one is in the light, so much will we have fellow-enjoyment with another who is in it. The apostle, as we have said, states this in an abstract and absolute way. This is the truest way to know the thing itself. The rest is only a question of realisation.

In the third place, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. To walk in the light as God is in it, to have fellowship with one another, to be cleansed from all sin by the blood; these are the three parts of christian position. We feel the need there is of the last; for, while walking in the light as God is in the light, with (blessed be God) a perfect revelation to us of Himself, with a nature that knows Him, that is capable of seeing Him spiritually, as the eye is made to appreciate light (for we participate in the divine nature), we cannot say that we have no sin. The light itself would contradict us. But we can say that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us perfectly from all sin.131 Through the Spirit we enjoy the light together: it is the common joy of our hearts before God, and well-pleasing to Him; a testimony to our common participation in the divine nature, which is love also. And our conscience is no hindrance, because we know the value of the blood. We have no conscience of sin upon us before God, though we know it is in us; but we have the conscience of being clean from it by the blood. But the same light which shews us this, prevents our saying (if we are in it) that we have no sin in us; we should deceive ourselves if we said so; and the truth would not be in us; for if the truth were in us, if that

revelation of the divine nature, which is light, Christ our life, were in us, the sin that is in us would be judged by the light itself. If it be not judged, this light—the truth which speaks of things as they are—is not in us.

If, on the other hand, we have even committed sin and all, being judged according to the light, is confessed (so that the will no longer takes part in it, the pride of that will being broken down), He is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all iniquity. If we say that we have not sinned132 (as a general truth), it shews not only that the truth is not in us, but we make God a liar; His word is not in us, for He says that all have sinned. There are the three things: we lie; the truth is not in us; we make God a liar. It is this fellowship with God in the light, which in practical daily christian life, inseparably connects forgiveness, and the present sense of it by faith, and purity of heart.

Thus we see the christian position (v. 7); and then the things which, in three different ways, are opposed to the truth—to communion with God in life. The apostle wrote that which relates to the communion with the Father and the Son, in order that their joy might be full.

That which he wrote according to the revelation of the nature of God, which he had received from Him who was the life from heaven, was in order that they should not sin. But to say this is to suppose that they might sin. Not that it is necessary they should do so; for the presence of sin in the flesh by no means obliges us to walk after the flesh. But if it should take place, there is provision made by grace, in order that grace may act, and that we may be neither condemned, nor brought again under the law.

We have an Advocate with the Father, One who carries on our cause for us on high. Now this is not in order to obtain righteousness, nor again to wash our sins away. All that has been done. Divine righteousness has placed us in the light, even as God Himself is in the light. But communion is interrupted, if even levity of thought finds place in our heart; for it is of the flesh, and the flesh has no communion with God. When communion is interrupted, when we have sinned (not when we have repented; for it is His intercession that leads to repentance), Christ intercedes for us. Righteousness is always present—our righteousness—"Jesus Christ the Righteous." Therefore, neither the righteousness nor the value of the propitiation for sin being changed, grace acts (one may say, acts necessarily) in virtue of that righteousness, and of that blood which is before God—acts, on the intercession of Christ who never forgets us, in order to bring us back to communion by means of repentance. Thus, while yet on earth, before Peter had committed the sin, He prayed for him; at the given moment He looks on him, and Peter repents and weeps bitterly for his offence. Afterwards the Lord does all that is necessary to make Peter judge the root itself of the sin; but all is grace.

It is the same in our case. Divine righteousness abides—the immutable foundation of our relationships with God, established on the blood of Christ. When communion, which exists only in the light, is interrupted, the intercession of Christ, available by virtue of His blood (for propitiation for the sin has also been made), restores the soul that it may still again enjoy communion with God according to the light, into which righteousness has introduced it.133 This propitiation is

made for the whole world, not for the Jews only, nor to the exclusion of any one at all; but for the whole world, God in His moral nature having been fully glorified by the death of Christ.

These three capital points—or, if you will, two capital points, and the third, namely, advocacy, which is supplementary— form the introduction, the doctrine of the epistle. All the rest is an experimental application of that which this part contains: namely, first (life being given), communion with the Father and the Son; second, the nature of God, light, which manifests the falsehood of all pretension to communion with the light, if the walk be in darkness; and third, seeing that sin is in us and that we may fail although we are cleansed before God so as to enjoy the light, the advocacy which Jesus Christ the righteous can always exercise before God, on the ground of the righteousness which is ever in His presence, and the blood which is shed for our sins, in order to restore our communion, when we have lost it by our guilty negligence.

The Spirit now proceeds to develop the characteristics of this divine life. Now we are sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ; that is to say, to obey on the same principles as those on which He obeyed; where His Father’s will was the motive as well as the rule of action. It is the obedience of a life to which it was meat and drink to do the will of God: not as under the law, in order to obtain life. The life of Jesus Christ was a life of obedience, in which He enjoyed the love of His Father perfectly, tested in all things and so proved perfect. His words, His commandments, were the expression of that life; they direct that life in us, and ought to exercise all the authority over us of Him who pronounced them.

The law promised life to those who obeyed it. Christ is the life. This life has been imparted to us—to believers. Therefore, the words which were the expression of that life, in its perfection in Jesus, direct and guide it in us according to that perfection. Besides this, it has authority over us. His commandments are its expression. We have therefore to obey, and to walk as He walked—the two forms of practical life. It is not enough to walk well: we must obey, for there is authority. This is the essential principle of a right walk. On the other hand, the obedience of the Christian—as is evident by that of Christ Himself—is not that which we often think. We call a child obedient, who, having a will of his own, submits himself at once when the authority of the parent intervenes to prevent his accomplishing it. But Christ never obeyed in this way. He came to do the will of God. Obedience was His mode of being. His Father's will was the motive, and, with the love that was never separate from it, the only motive of His every act and every impulse. This is obedience properly called christian. It is a new life which delights in doing the will of Christ, acknowledging His entire authority over it. We reckon ourselves to be dead to everything else; we are alive unto God, we are not our own. We only know Christ inasmuch as we are living by His life; for the flesh does not know Him, and cannot understand His life.

Now, that life is obedience: therefore he who says, "I know him," and does not observe His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. It does not say here, "he deceives himself," for it is very possible that he is not self-deceived, as in the other case of fancied communion; for here the will is in action, and a man knows it, if he will confess it. But the reality is not there;

he is a liar, and the truth in the knowledge of Jesus, which he professes, is not in him.

There are two remarks to be made here. First, that the apostle takes things always as they are in themselves in an abstract way, without the modifications that are occasioned by other things, in the midst of which, or in relation with which, the former are found. Second, that the chain of consequences which the apostle deduces is not that of outward reasoning, the force of which is consequently on the surface of the argument itself. He reasons from a great inward principle, so that one does not see the force of the argument unless one knows the fact, and even the scope, of that principle; and, in particular, that which the life of God is in its nature, in its character, and in its action. But, without possessing it, we do not and cannot understand anything about it. There is, indeed, the authority of the apostle and of the word to tell us that the thing is so, and that is sufficient. But the links of his discourse will not be understood without the possession of the life which interprets what he says, and which is itself interpreted by that which he says.

I return to the text. “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.” It is in this way that we are conscious that we know Him. His “word “has rather a wider sense than His “commandments.” That is to say, while it equally implies obedience, the word is less outward. “Commandments” are here details of the divine life. His “word” contains its whole expression—the spirit of that life.134 It is universal and absolute. Now this life is the divine life manifested in Jesus, and which is imparted to us. Have we seen it in Christ? Do we doubt that this is love; that the love of God has been

manifested in it? If then I keep His word; if the scope and meaning of the life which that word expresses is thus understood and realised, the love of God is perfect in me. The apostle, as we have seen, always speaks abstractedly. If in fact at any given moment I do not observe the word, in that point I do not realise His love; happy intercourse with God is interrupted. But so far as I am moved and governed absolutely by His word, His love is completely realised in me; for His word expresses what He is, and I am keeping it. This is the intelligent communion with His nature in its fulness, a nature in which I participate; so that I know that He is perfect love, I am filled with it, and this shews itself in my ways: for that word is the perfect expression of Himself.135 Consequently we know thus that we are in Him, for we realise that which He is in the communion of His nature. Now if we say that we abide in Him, it is evident, from what we have now seen in the instruction the apostle gives us, that we ought to walk as He walked. Our walk is the practical expression of our life; and this life is Christ known in His word. And since it is by His word, we who possess this life are under an intelligent responsibility to follow it; that is to say, to walk as He walked. For that word is the expression of His life.

Obedience then, as obedience, is thus far the moral characteristic of the life of Christ in us. But it is proof of that which, in Christianity, is inseparable from the life of Christ in us: we are in Him (compare John 14:20). We know, not merely that we know Him, but that we are in Him. The enjoyment of the perfect love of God in the path of obedience, gives us by the Holy Ghost the consciousness that we are in Him. But if I am in Him, I cannot indeed be what He was, for He was without sin;

but I ought to walk as He walked. Thus I know I am in Him. But if I make profession to abide in Him, my heart and spirit to be wholly there, I ought to walk as He walked. Obedience as a principle, and through keeping His word, and so the love of God perfected in me, knowing that I am in Him, are the formative principles and character of our life.

In verses 7 and 8 the two forms of the rule of this life are presented—forms which, moreover, answer to the two principles which we have just announced. It is not a new commandment which the apostle writes unto them but an old one; it is the word of Christ from the beginning. Were it not so, were it in this sense new, so much the worse for him who set it forth, for it would no longer be the expression of the perfect life of Christ Himself, but some other thing, or a falsification of that which Christ had set forth. This corresponds with the first principle, that is, obedience to commandments, to the commandments of Christ. What He said was the expression of what He was. He could command that they should love one another as He had loved them. Compare the Beatitudes.

In another sense it was a new commandment; for (by the power of the Spirit of Christ, being united to Him and drawing our life from Him) the Spirit of God manifested the effect of this life by revealing a glorified Christ in a new way. And now it was not only a commandment, but as the thing itself was true in Christ, it was so in His own as partakers of His nature and in Him; He also in them.

By this revelation, and by the presence of the Holy Ghost, the darkness disappeared,136 passed away, and

in fact the true light shone. There will be no different light in heaven: only then the light will be publicly displayed in glory without a cloud.

Verse 9. The life, as in John 1:4, is now found to be the light of men, only the brighter for faith that Christ is gone, for it is through the rent veil it shines most brightly. We have had the pretension to know Him discussed—to be in Him; now that of being in the light, and this before the Spirit of God applies in detail the qualities of this life, as a proof of its existence, to the heart, in answer to seducers who sought to terrify them by new notions, as though Christians were not really in possession of life, and, with life, of the Father and the Son. The true light now shines. And this light is God; it is the divine nature; and, as that which was a means of judging the seducers themselves, he brings out another quality connected with our being in the light, that is with God fully revealed. Christ was it in the world. We are set to be it, in that we are born of God. And one who has this nature loves his brother; for is not God love? Has not Christ loved us, not being ashamed to call us brethren? Can I have His life and His nature, if I do not love the brethren? No. I am then walking in darkness; I have no light on my path. He who loves his brother dwells in the light; the nature of God acts in him; and he dwells in the bright spiritual intelligence of that life, in the presence and in the communion of God. If any one hates, it is evident that he has not divine light. With feelings according to a nature opposed to God, how can it be pretended that he is in the light?

Moreover, there is no occasion of stumbling in one who loves, for he walks according to divine light. There is nothing in him which causes another to stumble, for the

revelation of the nature of God in grace will assuredly not do so: and it is this which is manifested in him who loves his brother.137 This closes as an introductory statement the first part of the epistle. It contains in the former half, the privileged place of Christians, the message giving us the truth of our state here, and the provision for failure: that ends with chapter 2, verse 2; in the second half, the proofs the Christian has of the true possession of the privilege according to the message: obedience, and love of the brethren, knowing Christ, being in Christ, enjoying the perfect love of God, abiding in Him, being in the light, forming the condition which is thus proved.

Having established the two great principles, obedience and love, as proofs of the possession of the divine nature, of Christ known as life, and of our abiding in Him, the apostle goes on to address Christians personally and to shew us the position, on the ground of grace, in three different degrees of ripeness. This parenthetical but most important address we will now consider.

He begins by calling all the Christians to whom he was writing, “children,” a term of affection in the loving and aged apostle. And as he writes to them (chap. 2:1) in order that they should not sin, so he writes also because all their sins were forgiven for Jesus’ name’s sake. This was the assured condition of all Christians: that which God had granted them in giving them faith, that they might glorify Him. He allows no doubt as to the fact of their being pardoned. He writes to them because they are so.

We next find three classes of Christians: fathers, young men, and babes. He addresses them each twice, fathers, young men, and babes (v. 13): fathers, in the first half of verse 14; young men from the second half, to the end of verse 17; and babes from verse 18 to the end of verse 27. In verse 28 he returns to all Christians under the name of “children.”

That which characterises fathers in Christ is that they have known Him who is from the beginning; that is, Christ. This is all that he has to say about them. All had resulted in that. He only repeats the same thing again, when, changing his form of expression, he begins anew with these three classes. The fathers have known Christ. This is the result of all christian experience. The flesh is judged, discerned, wherever it has mixed itself with Christ in our feelings; it is recognised, experimentally, as having no value; and, as the result of experience, Christ stands alone, free from all alloy. They have learnt to distinguish that which has only the appearance of good. They are not occupied with experience—that would be being occupied with self, with one’s own heart. All that has passed away; and Christ alone remains as our portion, unmingled with aught besides, even as He gave Himself to us. Moreover He is much better known; they have experienced what He is in so many details, whether of joy in communion with Him, or in the consciousness of weakness, or in the realisation of His faithfulness, of the riches of His grace, of His adaptation to our need, of His love, and in the revelation of His own fulness; so that they are able now to say, “I know whom I have believed.” Attachment to Himself characterises them. Such is the character of “fathers” in Christ.

“Young men” are the second class. They are distinguished by spiritual strength in conflict: the energy of faith. They have overcome the wicked one. For he speaks of what their character is as in Christ. Conflict they have as such, but the strength of Christ manifested in them.

The third class is “babes.” These know the Father. We see here that the Spirit of adoption and of liberty characterises the youngest child in the faith of Christ, that it is not the result of progress. It is the commencement. We possess it because we are Christians; and it is ever the distinguishing mark of beginners. The others do not lose it, but other things distinguish them.

In again addressing these three classes of Christians, the apostle, as we have seen, has only to repeat that which he at first said with regard to the fathers. It is the result of christian life.

In the case of the young men he develops his idea and adds some exhortations. “Ye are strong,” he says, “and the word of God abideth in you” —an important characteristic. The word is the revelation of God, and the application of Christ, to the heart, so that we have thus the motives which form and govern it, and a testimony founded on the state of the heart, and on convictions which have a divine power in us. It is the sword of the Spirit in our relations with the world. We have been ourselves formed by those things to which we bear testimony in our relations with the world, and those things are in us according to the power of the word of God. The wicked one is thus overcome; for he has only the world to present to our lusts: and the word abiding

in us keeps us in an altogether different sphere of thought in which a different nature is enlightened and strengthened by divine communications. The tendency of the young man is toward the world: the ardour of his nature, and the vigour of his age, tend to draw him away on that side. He has to guard against this by separating himself entirely from the world and the things that are in it; because if any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for those things do not come from the Father. He has a world of His own, of which Christ is the centre and glory. The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—these are the things that are in the world and that characterise it. There are really no other motives besides these in the world. Now these things are not of the Father.

The Father is the source of all that is according to His own heart—every grace, every spiritual gift, the glory, the heavenly holiness of all that was manifested in Christ Jesus, and that will be—all the world of glory to come, of which Christ is the centre. And all this had only the cross for its portion here below. But the apostle is speaking here of the source; and assuredly the Father is not the source of those other things.

Now the world passes away; but he who does the will of God, he who, in going through this world, takes for his guide, not the desires of nature, but the will of God—a will which is according to His nature and which expresses it—such a one shall abide for ever according to the nature and the will that he has followed after.

We shall find that the world, and the Father with all that is of Him, the flesh and the Spirit, the Son and the devil, are put respectively in opposition. Things are spoken of

in their source and moral nature, the principles that act in us and that characterise our existence and our position, and the two agents in good and evil that are opposed to each other, without (thanks be to God!) any uncertainty as to the issue of the conflict; for the weakness of Christ, in death, is stronger than the strength of Satan. He has no power against that which is perfect. Christ came that He might destroy the works of the devil.

To the babes the apostle speaks principally of the dangers to which they were exposed from seducers. He warns them with tender affection, reminding them at the same time that all the sources of intelligence and strength were open to them and belonged to them. “It is the last time”; not exactly the last days, but the season which had the final character that belonged to the dealings of God with this world. The Antichrist was to come, and already there were many antichrists: by this it might be known it was the last time. It was not merely sin, nor the transgression of the law; but, Christ having already been manifested, and being now absent and hidden from the world, there was a formal opposition to the especial revelation that had been made. It was not a vague and ignorant unbelief; it took a definite shape as having a will directed against Jesus. They might for instance believe all that a Jew believed, as it was revealed in the word; but as to the testimony of God by Jesus Christ they opposed it. They would not own Him to be the Christ; they denied the Father and the Son. This, as to religious profession, is the true character of the Antichrist. He may indeed believe or pretend to believe, that there shall be a Christ; yea, set himself up to be it. But the two aspects of Christianity (that which, on the

one hand, regards the accomplishment in the Person of Jesus of the promises made to the Jew; and, on the other hand, the heavenly and eternal blessings presented in the revelation of the Father by the Son), this the Antichrist does not accept. That which characterises him as Antichrist is that he denies the Father and the Son. To deny that Jesus is the Christ is indeed the Jewish disbelief that forms part of his character. That which gives him the character of Antichrist is that he denies the foundation of Christianity. He is a liar in that he denies Jesus to be the Christ; consequently it is the work of the father of lies. But all the unbelieving Jews had done as much without being Antichrist. To deny the Father and the Son characterises him.

But there is something more. These antichrists came out from among the Christians. There was apostasy. Not that they were really Christians, but they had been among the Christians and had come out from them. (How instructive for our days also is this epistle!) It was thus made manifest that they were not truly of the flock of Christ. All this had a tendency to shake the faith of babes in Christ. The apostle endeavours to strengthen them. There were two means of confirming their faith, which also inspired the apostle with confidence. Firstly, they had the unction of the Holy One; secondly, that which was from the beginning was the touchstone for all new doctrine, and they already possessed that which was from the beginning.

The indwelling of the Holy Ghost as an unction and spiritual intelligence in them, and the truth which they had received at the beginning—the perfect revelation of Christ—these were the safeguards against seducers and seductions. All heresy and all error and corruption will

be found to strike at the first and divine revelation of the truth, if the unction of the Holy One is in us to judge them. Now this unction is the portion of even the youngest babes in Christ, and they ought to be encouraged to realise it, however tenderly they may be cared for as they were here by the apostle.

What important truths we discover here for ourselves! The last time already manifested, so that we have to be on our guard against seducers—persons moreover issuing from the bosom of Christianity.

The character of this Antichrist is that he denies the Father and the Son. Unbelief in its Jewish form is also again manifested—owning that there is a Christ, but denying that Jesus is He. Our security against these seductions is the unction from the Holy One—the Holy Ghost, but in especial connection with the holiness of God, which enables us to see clearly into the truth (another characteristic of the Spirit); and, secondly, that that abide in us which we have heard from the beginning. It is this evidently which we have in the written word. “Development” note it well, is not that which we have from the beginning. By its very name it sins radically against the safeguard pointed out by the apostle. That which the church has taught, as development of the truth, whencesoever she may have received it, is not that which has been heard from the beginning.

There is another point indicated here by the apostle that ought to be noticed. People might pretend by giving God in a vague way the name of Father, that they possessed Him without the true possession of the Son, Jesus Christ. This cannot be. He who has not the Son has not

the Father. It is by Him that the Father is revealed, in Him that the Father is known.

If the truth that we have received from the beginning abides in us, we abide in the Son and in the Father; for this truth is the revelation of the Son, and is revealed by the Son, who is the truth. It is living truth, if it abides in us; thus, by possessing it, we possess the Son, and in the Son, the Father also. We abide in it, and thereby we have eternal life (compare John 17:3).

Now the apostle had happy confidence that the unction which they had received of Him abode in them, so that they needed not to be taught of others, for this same unction taught them with respect to all things. It was the truth, for it was the Holy Ghost Himself acting in the word, which was the revelation of the truth of Jesus Himself, and there was no lie in it. Thus should they abide in Him according to that which it had taught them.

Observe also, here, that the effect of this teaching by the unction from on high is twofold with regard to the discernment of the truth. They knew that no lie was of the truth; possessing this truth from God, that which was not it was a lie. They knew that this unction which taught them of all things was the truth, and that there was no lie in it. The unction taught them all things, that is to say, all the truth, as truth of God. Therefore that which was not it was a lie, and there was no lie in the unction. Thus the sheep hear the voice of the good Shepherd; if another calls them, it is not His voice, and that is enough. They fear it and flee from it, because they do not know it.

With verse 27 ends the second series of exhortations to the three classes. The apostle begins again with the

whole body of Christians (v. 28). This verse appears to me to correspond with verse 8 of the second epistle, and with chapter 3 of the first epistle to the Corinthians.

The apostle, having ended his address to those who were all in the communion of the Father, applies the essential principles of the divine life, of the divine nature as manifested in Christ, to test those who claimed participation in it; not in order to make the believer doubt, but for the rejection of that which was false. I say, “not to make the believer doubt”; for the apostle speaks of his position, and of the position of those to whom he was writing, with the most perfect assurance (chap. 3:1, 2).138 He had spoken, in re-commencement at verse 28, of the appearing of Jesus. This introduces the Lord in the full revelation of His character, and gives rise to the scrutiny of the pretensions of those who called themselves by His name. There are two proofs which belong essentially to the divine life, and a third which is accessory as privilege: righteousness or obedience, and love, and the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Righteousness is not in the flesh. If therefore it is really found in any one, he is born of Him, he derives his nature from God in Christ. We may remark, that it is righteousness as it was manifested in Jesus; for it is because we know that He is righteous, that we know that “he who doeth righteousness is born of him.” It is the same nature demonstrated by the same fruits. {1Jn 3}

Chapter 3. Now to say that we are born of Him is to say that we are children of God.139 What a love is that which the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be

called children!140 Therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. The apostle returns here to His appearing and its effect on us. We are children of God: this is our present sure and known position; we are born of God. That which we shall be is not yet manifested; but we know that—associated with Jesus as we are in the same relationship with the Father, Himself being our life—we shall be like Him when He appears. For it is to this we are predestined, to see Him as He now is with the Father, from which the life came which was manifested in Him and imparted to us, and to appear in the same glory.

Having then the hope of seeing Him as He is, and knowing that I shall be perfectly like Him when He appears, I seek to be as like Him now as possible, since I already possess this life— He being in me, my life.

This is the measure of our practical purification. We are not pure as He is pure; but we take Christ, as He is in heaven, for the pattern and measure of our purification, we purify ourselves according to His purity, knowing that we shall be perfectly like Him when He is manifested. Before marking the contrast between the principles of the divine life and of the enemy, he sets before us the true measure of purity (he will give that of love in a moment) for the children, inasmuch as they are partakers of His nature and have the same relationship with God.

There are two remarks to be made here. First, “hope in him” does not mean in the believer; but a hope that has Christ for its object. Second, it is striking to see the way in which the apostle appears to confound God and Christ together in this epistle; and uses the word “Him” to

signify Christ, when he had just been speaking of God, and vice versa. We may see the principle of this at the end of chapter 5: “We are in him that is true, [that is to say] in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” In these few words we have the key to the epistle: Christ is the life. It is evidently the Son; but it is God Himself who is manifested, and the perfection of His nature, which is the source of life to us also, as that life was found in Christ as man. Thus I can speak of God and say, “Born of him”; but it is in Jesus that God was manifested, and from Him that I derive life; so that “Jesus Christ” and “God” are interchanged with each other. Thus “He shall appear” (chap. 2:28) is Christ, He is righteous; the righteous one “is born of him.” But in chapter 3:1 it is “born of God,” “children of God”; but the world did not know Him: here it is Christ on earth; and “when he shall appear,” it is again Christ and we purify ourselves “even as He is pure.” There are many other examples.

It is said of the believer, “he purifies himself”: this shews that he is not pure, as Christ is. He needed not to purify Himself. Accordingly it is not said, he is pure as Christ is pure (for in that case there would be no sin in us); but he purifies himself according to the purity of Christ as He is in heaven, having the same life as the life of Christ Himself.

Having set forth the positive aspect of christian purity, he goes on to speak of it in other points of view, as one of the characteristic proofs of the life of God in the soul.

He who commits sin (not transgresses the law,141 but) acts lawlessly. His conduct is without the restraint, without the rule of law. He acts without curb; for sin is

the acting without the curb of law or restraint of another's authority, acting from our own will. Christ came to do His Father's will, not His own. But Christ was manifested that He might take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin; so that he who commits sin acts against the object of the manifestation of Christ, and in opposition to the nature of which, if Christ is our life, we are partakers. Therefore he who abides in Christ does not practise sin; he who sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. All depends, we see, on participation in the life and nature of Christ. Let us not then deceive ourselves. He who practises righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous: for, by partaking in the life of Christ, one is before God according to the perfection of Him who is there, the head and source of that life. But we are thus as Christ before God, because He Himself is really our life. Our actual life is not the measure of our acceptance; it is Christ who is so. But Christ is our life, if we are accepted according to His excellence; for it is as living of His life that we participate in this.

But the judgment is more than negative. He who practises sin is of the devil, has morally the same nature as the devil; for he sinneth from the beginning: it is his original character as the devil. Now Christ was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil; how then can one who shares the character of this enemy of souls be with Christ?

On the other hand, he who is born of God does not practise sin. The reason is evident; he is made a partaker of the nature of God; he derives his life from Him. This principle of divine life is in him. The seed of God remains in him; he cannot sin, because he is born of God. This new nature had not in it the principle of sin, so

as to commit it. How could it be that the divine nature should sin?

Having thus designated the two families, the family of God and that of the devil, the apostle adds the second mark, the absence of which is a proof that one is not of God. He had already spoken of righteousness; he adds the love of the brethren. For this is the message that they had received from Christ Himself, that they should love one another. In verse 12 he shews the connection between the two things: that hatred of a brother is fed by the sense one has that his works are good, and one's own evil. Moreover we are not to wonder that the world hates us: for we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. If this love is an essential proof of being renewed, it is quite natural that it should not be found in the men of the world. But, this being the case, he who does not love his brother (solemn thought!), abides in death. In addition to this, he who does not love his brother is a murderer, and a murderer has not eternal life. There is the absence of the divine nature, death; but more, the activity of the old man in the opposite nature is there, he hates, and is in spirit the activity of death—a murderer.

Further, as in the case of righteousness and of purity, we have Christ as the measure of this love. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; we ought to lay down ours for the brethren. Now, if our brother has need, and we possess this world's good, but do not provide for his necessity, is that the divine love which made Christ lay down His life for us? It is by this real and practical love that we know we are in the truth, and that our heart is confirmed and assured before God. For if there is nothing on the conscience, we have

confidence in His presence; but if our own heart condemns us, God knows yet more.

It is not here the means of being assured of our salvation, but of having confidence in the presence of God. We cannot have it with a bad conscience in the practical sense of the word, for God is always light and always holy.

We also receive all that we ask for, when we walk thus in love before Him, doing that which is pleasing in His sight; for thus walking in His presence with confidence, the heart and its desires respond to this blessed influence, being formed by the enjoyment of communion with Him in the light of His countenance. It is God who animates the heart; this life, and this divine nature, of which the epistle speaks, being in full activity and enlightened and moved by the divine presence in which it delights. Thus our requests are only for the accomplishment of desires that arise when this life, when our thoughts are filled with the presence of God and with the communication of His nature. And He lends His power to the fulfilment of these desires, of which He is the source, and which are formed in the heart by the revelation of Himself (compare John 15:7). This is indeed the position of Christ Himself when here below: only that He was perfect in it (compare John 8:29; 11:42).

And here it is the commandment of God which He desires us to obey; namely, to believe on the name of His Son Jesus; and to love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Now he who keeps His commandments dwells in Him; and He dwells also in this obedient man. It will be asked whether God or Christ is here meant? The apostle, as we

have seen, confounds them together in his thought. That is to say, the Holy Ghost unites them in our minds. We are in Him who is true, that is, in His Son Jesus Christ. It is Christ, who is the presentation of God to men in life in man; and to the believer He is the communication of that life, so that God too dwells in him, in the revelation, in its divine excellence and perfection, of the nature which the believer shares in the power of the Holy Ghost who dwells in him, so that love is alike enjoyed and exercised.

But what marvellous grace to have received a life, a nature, by which we are enabled to enjoy God Himself, who dwells in us, and by which, since it is in Christ, we are in fact in the enjoyment of this communion, this relationship with God! He who has the Son has life; but God then dwells in him as the portion, as well as the source of this life; and he who has the Son has the Father.

What marvellous links of vital and living enjoyment through the communication of the divine nature of Him who is its source; and that according to its perfection in Christ! Such is the Christian according to grace. Therefore also he is obedient, because this life in the man Christ (and it is thus that it becomes ours) was obedience itself, the true relationship of man to God.

Practical righteousness, then, is a proof that we are born of Him who, in His nature, is its source. In presence also of the world’s hatred, we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. Thus, having a good conscience, we have confidence in God, and we receive from Him whatsoever we ask, walking in

obedience and in a way that is pleasing to Him. Thus walking, we dwell in Him142 and He in us.

A third proof of our christian privileges arises here. The Spirit whom He has given us is the proof that He Himself dwells in us, the manifestation of the presence of God in us. He does not here add that we abide in Him, because the subject here is the manifestation of the presence of God. The presence of the Spirit demonstrates it. But in abiding in Him there is, as we shall see farther on, the enjoyment of that which He is, and consequently moral communion with His nature. He who obeys enjoys this also, as we have seen. Here the presence of the Holy Ghost in us is spoken of as demonstration of one part only of this truth, namely, that God is in us. But the presence of God in us according to grace, and according to the power of the Spirit, involves also communion with that nature; we dwell also in Him from whom we derive this grace, and all the spiritual forms of that nature, in communion and practical life. It is in verses 12 and 16 of chapter 4 that our apostle speaks of this.

Practical righteousness or obedience, the love of the brethren, the manifestation of the Spirit of God, are the proofs of our relationship to God. He who obeys the Lord’s commandments in practical righteousness dwells in Him, and He in him. The Spirit given is the proof that He dwells in us.

Now, to make use of this last proof, caution was required, for many false prophets would assume, and even in the time of the apostle had already assumed, the semblance of having received communications from the Spirit of God, and insinuated themselves among the

Christians (chap. 4). It was necessary therefore to put them on their guard, by giving them the sure mark of the real Spirit of God. The first of these was the confession of Jesus come in the flesh. It is not merely to confess that He is come, but to confess Him thus come. The second was that He who really knew God hearkened to the apostles. In this way the writings of the apostles become a touchstone for those who pretend to teach the assembly. All the word is so, doubtless; but I confine myself here to that which is said in this place. The teaching of the apostles is formally a touchstone for all other teaching—I mean that which they themselves taught immediately. If any one tells me that others must explain or develop it to have the truth and certainty of faith, I reply, "You are not of God, for he who is of God hearkens to them; and you would have me not to hearken to them; and whatever may be your pretext, you prevent my doing so." The denial of Jesus come in the flesh is the spirit of Antichrist. Not to hear the apostles is the provisional and preparatory form of the evil. True Christians had overcome the spirit of error by the Spirit of God who dwelt in them.

The three tests of true Christianity are now distinctly laid down, and the apostle pursues his exhortations, developing the fulness and intimacy of our relationships with a God of love, maintaining that participation of nature in which love is of God, and he who loves is born of God—partakes therefore of His nature, and knows Him (for it is by faith that he received it) as partaking of His nature. He who loves not does not know God. We must possess the nature that loves in order to know what love is. He then who does not love does not know God, for God is love. Such a person has not one

sentiment in connection with the nature of God; how then can he know Him? No more than an animal can know what a man's mind or understanding is when he has not got it.

Give especial heed, reader, to this immense prerogative, which flows from the whole doctrine of the epistle. The eternal life which was with the Father has been manifested and has been imparted to us: thus we are partakers of the divine nature. The affections of that nature acting in us rest, by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the enjoyment of communion with God who is its source; we dwell in Him and He in us. The first thing is the statement of the truth in us. The actings of this nature prove that He dwells—that, if we thus love, God Himself dwells in us. He who works this love is there. But He is infinite and the heart rests in Him; we know at the same time that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. But this passage, so rich in blessing, demands that we should follow it with order.

He begins with the fact that love is of God. It is His nature: He is its source. Therefore he who loves is born of God, is a partaker of His nature. Also he knows God, for he knows what love is, and God is its fulness. This is the doctrine which makes everything depend on our participation in the divine nature.

Now this might be transformed on the one hand into mysticism, by leading us to fix our attention on our love for God, and love in us, that being God's nature, as if it was said, love is God, not God is love, and by seeking to fathom the divine nature in ourselves; or to doubt on the other, because we do not find the effects of the divine

nature in us as we would. In effect, he who does not love (for the thing, as ever in John, is expressed in an abstract way) does not know God, for God is love. The possession of the nature is necessary to the understanding of what that nature is, and for the knowledge of Him who is its perfection.

But, if I seek to know it and have or give the proof of it, it is not to the existence of the nature in us that the Spirit of God directs the thoughts of the believers as their object. God, he has said, is love; and this love has been manifested towards us in that He has given His only Son, that we might live through Him. The proof is not the life in us, but that God has given His Son in order that we might live, and further to make propitiation for our sins. God be praised! we know this love, not by the poor results of its action in ourselves, but in its perfection in God, and that even in a manifestation of it towards us, which is wholly outside ourselves. It is a fact outside ourselves which is the manifestation of this perfect love. We enjoy it by participating in the divine nature; we know it by the infinite gift of God’s Son. The exercise and proof of it are there.

The full scope of this principle and all the force of its truth are stated and demonstrated in that which follows. It is striking to see how the Holy Spirit, in an epistle which is essentially occupied with the life of Christ and its fruits in us, gives the proof and full character of love in that which is wholly without ourselves. Nor can anything be more perfect than the way in which the love of God is here set forth, from the time it is occupied with our sinful state till we stand before the judgment-seat. God has thought of all: love towards us as sinners,

verses 9, 10; in us as saints, verse 12; with us as perfect in our condition in view of the day of judgment, verse 17. In the first verses, the love of God is manifested in the gift of Christ; firstly, to give us life—we were dead; secondly, to make propitiation—we were guilty. Our whole case is taken up. In the second of these verses the great principle of grace, what love is, where and how known, is clearly stated in words of infinite importance as to the very nature of Christianity. Herein is love, not that we have loved God (that was the principle of the law), but in that He has loved us, and has given His Son to make propitiation for our sins. Here, then, it is that we have learnt that which love is. It was perfect in Him when we had no love for Him; perfect in Him in that He exercised it towards us when we were in our sins, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for them. The apostle then affirms, no doubt, that he who loves not knows not God. The pretension to possess this love is judged by this means; but in order to know love we must not seek for it in ourselves, but seek it manifested in God when we had none. He gives the life which loves, and He has made propitiation for our sins.

And now with regard to the enjoyment and the privileges of this love:—if God has so loved us (this is the ground that He takes) we ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God: if we love one another, God dwells in us. His presence, Himself dwelling in us, rises in the excellency of His nature above all the barriers of circumstances, and attaches us to those who are His. It is God in the power of His nature which is the source of thought and feeling, and diffuses itself among them in whom it is. One can understand this. How is it that I love strangers from another land, persons of different habits

whom I have never known, more intimately than members of my own family after the flesh? How is it that I have thoughts in common, objects infinitely loved in common, affections powerfully engaged, a stronger bond with persons whom I have never seen, than with the otherwise dear companions of my childhood? It is because there is in them and in me a source of thoughts and affections which is not human. God is in it. God dwells in us. What happiness! What a bond! Does He not communicate Himself to the soul? Does He not render it conscious of His presence in love? Assuredly, yes. And if He is thus in us, the blessed source of our thoughts, can there be fear, or distance, or uncertainty, with regard to what He is? None at all. His love is perfect in us. We know Him as love in our souls: the second great point in this remarkable passage, the enjoyment of divine love in our souls.

The apostle has not yet said, “We know that we dwell in him.” He will say it now. But, if the love of the brethren is in us, God dwells in us. When it is in exercise, we are conscious of the presence of God, as perfect love in us. It fills the heart, and thus is exercised in us. Now this consciousness is the effect of the presence of His Spirit, as the source and power of life and nature, in us. He has given us, not here “his Spirit”— the proof that He dwells in us, but “of his Spirit”; we participate by His presence in us in divine affection through the Spirit, and thus we not only know that He dwells in us, but the presence of the Spirit, acting in a nature which is that of God in us, makes us conscious that we dwell in Him. For He is the infiniteness and perfection of that which is now in us.

The heart rests in this, and enjoys Him, and is hidden from all that is outside Him, in the consciousness of the

perfect love in which (thus dwelling in Him) one finds oneself. The Spirit makes us dwell in God, and gives us thus the consciousness that He dwells in us. Thus we, in the savour and consciousness of the love that was in it, can testify of that in which it was manifested beyond all Jewish limits, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. We shall see further another character of it.

If we compare verse 12 of our chapter 4 with chapter 1:18 of the Gospel by John, we shall better apprehend the scope of the apostle's teaching here. The same difficulty, or if you will, the same truth is presented in both cases. No one has ever seen God. How is this met?

In John 1:18 the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. He who is143 in the most perfect intimacy, in the most absolute proximity and enjoyment of the Father's love, the one eternal, sufficient object that knew the love of the Father as His only Son, has revealed Him unto men as He has Himself known Him. What is the answer in our epistle to this same difficulty? "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." By the communication of the divine nature, and by the dwelling of God in us, we inwardly enjoy Him as He has been manifested and declared by His only Son. His love is perfect in us, known to the heart, as it has been declared in Jesus. The God who has been declared by Him dwells in us. What a thought! that this answer to the fact that no one has ever seen God is equally, that the only Son has declared Him, and that He dwells in us. What light this throws upon the words, "which thing is true in him and in you!" 144For it is in that Christ has become our life that we can thus enjoy God and His

presence in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. And from this we have seen that the testimony of verse 14 flows.

We see, also, the distinction between God dwelling in us and we in God, even in that which Christ says of Himself. He abode always in the Father, and the Father in Him; but He says, “The Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” Through His word the disciples ought to have believed in them both; but in that which they had seen—in His works —they had rather seen the proof that the Father dwelt in Him. They who had seen Him had seen the Father. But when the Comforter was come, at that day they should know that Jesus was in His Father—divinely one with the Father.

He does not say that we are in God, nor in the Father, 145): but that we dwell in Him, and we know it, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have already noticed that He says (chap. 3:24) “hereby we know that he [God] abideth in us, because he has given us his Spirit.” Here he adds, We know that we dwell in God, because it is—not the manifestation, as a proof, but—communion with God Himself. We know that we dwell in Him, always as a precious truth—an unchangeable fact; sensibly, when His love is active in the heart. Consequently it is to this activity that the apostle immediately turns by adding “and we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” This was the proof for every one, of that love which the apostle enjoyed—as all believers do— in his own heart. It is important to notice how the passage thus first presents the fact of God’s dwelling in us, then the effect (as He is infinite), our dwelling in Him, and then the realisation of the first truth in conscious reality of life.

We may remark here that, while God's dwelling in us is a doctrinal fact and true of every real Christian, our dwelling in Him, though involved in it, is connected with our state. Thus chapter 3:24, "He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him." Chapter 4:16, "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him."

Love one to another is indeed taken as the proof that God is there, and His love is perfected in us—this to contrast the manner of His presence with that of Christ (John 1:18). But what we thus know is dwelling in Him and He in us. In each case this knowledge is by the Spirit. Verse 15 is the universal fact; verse 16 brings it fully up to its source. We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. His nature is there declared in itself (for we joy in God); God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God and God in him. There is none anywhere else: if we partake of His nature, we partake of it3 and he who abides in it abides in God who is the fulness of it. But then remark that while what He is is insisted on, His personal being is carefully insisted on. He dwells in us.

And here comes in a principle of deep importance. It might perhaps be said that this dwelling of God in us and our dwelling in Him depended on a large measure of spirituality, the apostle having in fact spoken of the highest possible joy. But although the degree in which we intelligently realise it is in effect a matter of spirituality, yet the thing in itself is the portion of every Christian. It is our position, because Christ is our life, and because the Holy Ghost is given us. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." How great the grace of the

gospel! How admirable our position because it is in Jesus that we possess it! It is important to hold fast this, that it is the portion of every Christian, the joy of the humble, the strongest reproach to the conscience of the careless.

The apostle explains this high position by the possession of the divine nature—the essential condition of Christianity. A Christian is one who is a partaker of the divine nature, and in whom the Spirit dwells. But the knowledge of our position does not flow from the consideration of this truth, though it depends on its being true, but of that of God's own love, as we have already seen. And the apostle goes on to say, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." This is the source of our knowledge and enjoyment of these privileges, so sweet and so marvellously exalted, but so simple and so real to the heart when they are known.

We have known love, the love that God has for us, and we have believed it. Precious knowledge! by possessing it we know God; for it is thus that He has manifested Himself. Therefore can we say, "God is love." There is none beside. Himself is love. He is love in all its fulness. He is not holiness, He is holy; but He is love. He is not righteousness; He is righteous.146 By dwelling then in love I dwell in Him, which I could not do unless He dwelt in me, and this He does. Here he puts it first, that we dwell in Him, because it is God Himself who is before our eyes, as the love in which we dwell. Therefore, when thinking of this love, I say that I dwell in Him, because I have in my heart the consciousness of it by the Spirit. At the same time this love is an active energetic principle in us; it is God Himself who is there. This is the joy of our position— the position of every Christian.

Verses 14 and 16 present the twofold effect of the manifestation of this love. Firstly, the testimony that the Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Quite outside the promises made to the Jews (as everywhere in John), this work is the fruit of that which God Himself is. Accordingly whosoever confesses Jesus to be that Son enjoys all the fulness of its blessed consequences.

Secondly, the Christian has believed for himself in this love, and he enjoys it according to its fulness. There is only this modification of the expression of the glorious fact of our portion —that the confession of Jesus as the Son of God is primarily here the proof that God dwells in us, although the other part of the truth equally says that he who confesses Him dwells also in God.

When speaking of our portion in communion, as believing in this love, it is said, that he who dwells in love dwells in God; for in effect that is where the heart is. Here also the other part of the truth is equally true; God dwells in him likewise.

I have spoken of the consciousness of this dwelling in God, for it is thus only that it is known. But it is important to remember that the apostle teaches it as a truth that applies to every believer. These might have excused themselves for not appropriating these statements as too high for them; but this fact judges the excuse. This communion is neglected. But God dwells in every one who confesses that Jesus is Son of God, and he in God. What an encouragement for a timid believer! What a rebuke for a careless one!

The apostle returns to our relative position, viewing God as outside ourselves, as Him before whom we are to

appear and with whom we have always to do. This is the third great proof and character of love in which it is complete, testifying, as I have already said, that God has thought on all as to us from our sinful state to the day of judgment.

Herein is love perfect with us (in order that we may have boldness for the day of judgment), namely, that as He is, such are we in this world. In truth, what could give us a more complete assurance for that day than to be as Jesus Himself— like the judge? He who will judge in righteousness is our righteousness. We are in Him the righteousness according to which He will judge. We are in respect of judgment as He is. Truly this can give us perfect peace. But observe, that it is not only in the day of judgment that this is so (it gives us boldness for it), but we are it in this world. Not as He was, but in this world we are as He is, and have our known place already, as needed, and according to the nature and counsels of God, for that day. It is ours as being livingly identified with Him.

Now in love there is no fear; there is confidence. If I am sure that a person loves me, I do not fear him. If I am only desiring to be the object of his affection, I may fear that I am not so, and may even fear himself. Nevertheless this fear would always tend to destroy my love for him and my desire to be loved by him. There is incompatibility between the two affections—there is no fear in love. Perfect love then banishes fear; for fear torments us, and torment is not the enjoyment of love. He therefore who fears does not know perfect love. And now what does he mean by “perfect love “? It is that which God is, and which He has fully displayed in Christ, and given us to know and to enjoy by His presence in us,

so that we dwell in Him. The positive proof of its complete perfect-ness is that we are such as Christ is. It is manifested towards us, perfected in us, and made perfect with us. But that which we enjoy is God, who is love, and we enjoy Him by His being in us, so that love and confidence are in our hearts, and we have rest. That which I know of God is that He is love, and love to me, and nothing else but love to me, because it is Himself who is so. Therefore there is no fear.147 If we inquire practically into the history, so to speak, of these affections; if we seek to separate that which in the enjoyment is united, because the divine nature in us, which is love, enjoys love in its perfection in God (His love shed abroad in the heart by His presence therefore); if we wish to specify the relationship in which our hearts find themselves with God in regard to this, here it is: “we love him because he first loved us.” It is grace and it must be grace, because it is God who is to be glorified.

Here, it will be worth our while to notice the order of this remarkable passage. Verses 7-10: We possess the nature of God; consequently we love; we are born of Him, and we know Him. But the manifestation of love towards us in Christ Jesus is the proof of that love; it is thus that we know it. Verses 11-16:We enjoy it by dwelling in it. It is present life in the love of God by the presence of His Spirit in us; the enjoyment of that love by communion, in that God dwells in us, and we thus dwell in Him. Verse 17: His love is perfected with us; the perfection of that love, viewed in the place that it has given us in view of judgment—we are, in this world, such as Christ is. Verses 18, 19:it is thus fully perfected with us. Love to sinners, communion, perfection before

God, give us the moral and characteristic elements of that love—what it is in our relationship with God.

In the first passage, where the apostle speaks of the manifestation of this love, he does not go beyond the fact that one who loves is born of God. The nature of God (which is love) being in us, he who loves knows Him, for he is born of Him—has His nature and realises what it is.

It is that which God has been with regard to the sinner which demonstrates His nature of love. Afterwards, that which we learnt as sinners we enjoy as saints. The perfect love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and we dwell in Him. As already with Jesus in this world, and as He is, fear has no place in one to whom the love of God is a dwelling-place and rest.

Verse 20: the reality of our love to God, fruit of His love to us, is now tested. If we say that we love God and do not love the brethren, we are liars; for if the divine nature, so near us (in the brethren near us), and Christ's value for them, does not awaken our spiritual affections, how then can He who is afar off do so? This also is His commandment, that he who loves God love his brother also. Obedience is found here also (compare John 14:31).

Love for the brethren proves the reality of our love for God. And this love must be universal, must be in exercise towards all Christians, for whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and he who loves a person will love one who is born of Him. And if the being born of Him is the motive, we shall love all that are born of Him (chap. 5:1).

But a danger exists on the other side. It may be, that we love the brethren because they are pleasant to us; they furnish us with agreeable society, in which our conscience is not wounded. A counter-proof is therefore given us. “Hereby we know that we love the children of God, if we love God and keep his commandments.” It is not as children of God that I love the brethren, unless I love God of whom they are born. I may love them individually as companions, or I may love some among them, but not as the children of God, if I do not love God Himself. If God Himself has not His true place in my heart, that which bears the name of love to the brethren shuts out God; and that in so much the more complete and subtle manner, because our link with them bears the sacred name of brotherly love.

Now there is a touchstone even for this love of God, namely, obedience to His commands. If I walk with the brethren themselves in disobedience to their Father, it is certainly not because they are His children that I love them. If it were because I loved the Father and because they were His children, I should assuredly like them to obey Him. To walk then in disobedience with the children of God, under the pretext of brotherly love, is not to love them as the children of God. If I loved them as such, I should love their Father and my Father, and I could not walk in disobedience to Him and call it a proof that I loved them because they were His.

If I also loved them because they were His children, I should love all who are such, because the same motive engages me to love them all. The universality of this love with regard to all the children of God; its exercise in practical obedience to His will: these are the marks of true brotherly love. That which has not these marks is a

mere carnal party spirit, clothing itself with the name and the forms of brotherly love. Most certainly I do not love the Father if I encourage His children in disobedience to Him.

Now there is an obstacle to this obedience, and that is the world. The world has its forms, which are very far from obedience to God. When we are occupied only with Him and His will, the world's enmity soon breaks out. It also acts, by its comfort and its delights, on the heart of man as walking after the flesh. In short, the world and the commandments of God are in opposition to each other; but the commandments of God are not grievous to those who are born of Him, for he who is born of God overcomes the world. He possesses a nature and a principle that surmount the difficulties that the world opposes to his walk. His nature is the divine nature, for he is born of God; his principle is that of faith. His nature is insensible to the attractions which this world offers to the flesh, and that because it has, altogether apart from this world, a spirit independent of it, and an object of its own which governs it. Faith directs its steps, but faith does not see the world, nor that which is present. Faith believes that Jesus, whom the world rejected, is the Son of God. The world therefore has lost its power over it. Its affections and its trust are fixed on Jesus, who was crucified, owning Him as the Son of God. Thus the believer, detached from the world, has the boldness of obedience, and does the will of God which abides for ever.

The apostle sums up, in a few words, the testimony of God respecting the life eternal which He has given us. This life is not in the first Adam, it is in the last—in the Son of God. Man, as born of Adam, does not possess it,

does not acquire it. He ought indeed to have gained life under the law. This characterised it, “Do this and live.” But man did not and could not.

God gives him eternal life, and this fife is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, and he who has not the Son has not life.

Now what is the testimony rendered to this gift of life eternal? The witnesses are three: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. This Jesus, the Son of God, is He who came by water and by blood; not by water only, but by water and by blood. The Spirit also bears witness because He is truth. That to which they bear witness is that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son. But whence did this water and the blood flow? It was from the pierced side of Jesus. It is the judgment of death pronounced and executed (compare Rom. 8:3) on the flesh, on all that is of the old man, on the first Adam. Not that the sin of the first Adam was in the flesh of Christ, but that Jesus died in it as a sacrifice for sin. “In that he died he died unto sin once.” Sin in the flesh was condemned in the death of Christ in the flesh. There was no other remedy. The flesh could not be modified nor subjected to the law. The life of the first Adam was nothing but sin in the principle of its will; it could not be subject to the law. Our purification as to the old man is its death. He who is dead is justified from sin. We are therefore baptised to have part in the death of Jesus. We are crucified with Christ; nevertheless we live, but not we, it is Christ who lives in us. Participating in the life of Christ risen, we reckon ourselves as dead with Him; for why live of this new life, this life of the last Adam, if we could live before God in the life of the first Adam? No; by living in Christ we have accepted by faith the sentence

of death, passed by God on the first Adam. This is christian purification: even the death of the old man, because we are made partakers of life in Christ Jesus. “We are dead”— crucified with Him. We need a perfect purification before God; we have it, for that which was impure no longer exists: what exists, as born of God, is perfectly pure.

He came by water—a powerful testimony, as flowing from the side of a dead Christ, that life is not to be sought for in the first Adam; for Christ, as coming for man, taking up his cause, the Christ come in the flesh, had to die: else He had remained alone in His own purity. Life is to be sought for in the Son of God risen from among the dead. Purification is by death.

But it was not by water only that He came; it was also by blood. The expiation of our sins was as necessary as the moral purification of our souls. We possess it in the blood of a slain Christ. Death alone could expiate them and blot them out, and Jesus died for us. The guilt of the believer no longer exists before God; Christ has put Himself in his place. The life is on high, and we are raised up together with Him, God having forgiven us all our trespasses. Expiation is by death.

The third witness is the Spirit: put first in the order of their testimony on earth, as He alone gives witness in power so that we know the other two; last, in their historic order, for such in fact was that order, death first and only thereafter the Holy Ghost.148 In effect it is the testimony of the Spirit, His presence in us, which enables us to appreciate the value of the water and the blood. We should never have understood the practical bearing of the death of Christ, if the Holy Ghost were

not to the new man a revealing power of its import and its efficacy. Now the Holy Ghost came down from a risen and ascended Christ; and thus we know that eternal life is given us in the Son of God.

The testimony of these three witnesses meets together in this same truth, namely, that grace—that God Himself—has given us eternal life; and that this life is in the Son. Man had nothing to do in it, except by his sins. It is the gift of God, and the life that He gives is in the Son. The testimony is the testimony of God. How blessed to have such a testimony, and that from God Himself, and in perfect grace!

We have then the three things: the cleansing, the expiation, and the presence of the Holy Ghost as the witness that eternal life is given us in the Son, who was slain for man when in relationship with man here below. He could but die for man as he is. Life is elsewhere, namely, in Himself.

Here the doctrine of the epistle ends. The apostle wrote these things in order that they who believed in the Son might know that they had eternal life. He does not give means of examination to make the faithful doubt whether they had eternal life; but—seeing that there were seducers who endeavoured to turn them aside as deficient in something important, and who presented themselves as possessing some superior light—he points out to them the marks of life, in order to re-assure them; developing the excellence of that life, and of their position as enjoying it; and in order that they might understand that God had given it to them, and that they might be in no wise shaken in mind.

He then speaks of the practical confidence in God which flows from all this—confidence exercised with a view to all our wants here below, all that our hearts desire to ask of God. We know that He always listens to everything that we ask in accordance with His will. Precious privilege! The Christian himself would not desire anything to be granted him that was contrary to the will of God. But for everything that is according to His will, His ear is ever open to us, ever attentive. He always hearkens; He is not like man, often occupied so that he cannot listen, or careless so that he will not. God always hears us, and assuredly He does not fail in power: the attention He pays us is a proof of His good-will. We receive therefore the things that we ask of Him. He grants our requests. What a sweet relationship! What a high privilege! And it is one also of which we may avail ourselves in charity for others.

If a brother sins and God chastises him, we may petition for that brother, and life shall be restored him. Chastisement tends to the death of the body (compare Job 33 and 34; James 5:14, 15); we pray for the offender and he is healed. Otherwise the sickness takes its course. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is such sin as is unto death. This does not seem to me to be some particular sin, but all sin which has such a character that, instead of awakening christian charity, it awakens christian indignation. Thus Ananias and Sapphira committed a sin unto death. It was a lie, but a lie under such circumstances that it excited horror rather than compassion. We can easily understand this in other cases.

Thus far as to sin and its chastisement. But the positive side is also brought before us. As born of God, we do not

commit sin at all, we keep ourselves, and “the wicked one toucheth us not.” He has nothing wherewith to entice the new man. The enemy has no objects of attraction to the divine nature in us, which is occupied, by the action of the Holy Ghost, with divine and heavenly things, or with the will of God. Our part therefore is so to live—the new man occupied with the things of God and of the Spirit.

The apostle ends his epistle by specifying these two things: our nature, our mode of being, as Christians; and the object that has been communicated to us in order to produce and nourish faith.

We know that we are of God; and that not in a vague way, but in contrast with all that is not us—a principle of immense importance, which makes christian position exclusive by its very nature. It is not merely good, or bad, or better; but it is of God. And nothing which is not of God (that is to say, which has not its origin in Him) could have this character and this place. The whole world lies in the wicked one.

The Christian has the certainty of these two things by virtue of his nature, which discerns and knows that which is of God, and thereby judges all that is opposed to it. The two are not merely good and bad, but of God and of the enemy. This as to the nature.

With regard to the object of this nature, we know that the Son of God is come—a truth of immense importance also. It is not merely that there is good and that there is evil; but the Son of God has Himself come into this scene of misery, to present an object to our hearts. But there is more than this. He has given us an understanding that in the midst of all the falsehood of

this world, of which Satan is the prince, we may know Him that is true—the true One. Immense privilege which alters our whole position! The power of the world by which Satan blinded us is completely broken, and we are brought into the true light; and in that light we see and know Him who is true, who is in Himself perfection; that by which all things can be perfectly discerned and judged according to truth. But this is not all. We are in this true One, partakers of His nature, and abiding in Him, and in order that we may enjoy the source of truth. 149 Now it is in Jesus that we are. It is thus, it is in Him, that we are in connection with the perfections of God.

We may again remark here—that which gives a character to the whole epistle—the manner in which God and Christ are united in the apostle's mind. It is on account of this that he so frequently says, "He," when we must understand "Christ," although he had previously spoken of God: for instance, chapter 4:20. And here, "We are in him that is true [that is to say], in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

Behold then the divine links of our position! We are in Him who is true; this is the nature of Him in whom we are. Now, in reality as to the nature, it is God Himself; as to the Person, and as to the manner of being in Him, it is His Son Jesus Christ. It is in the Son, in the Son as man, that we are in fact as to His Person; but He is the true God, the veritable God.

Nor is this all; but we have life in Him. He is also the eternal life, so that we possess it in Him. We know the true God, we have eternal life. All that is outside this is an idol. May God preserve us from it, and teach us by

His grace to preserve ourselves from it! This gives occasion to the Spirit of God to speak of “the truth” in the two short epistles that follow.

127 And this is morally very important; while it is in Him, not in myself, that I rejoice and delight.

128 The life has been manifested. Therefore we have no longer to seek for it, to grope after it in the darkness, to explore at random the indefinite, or the obscurity of our own hearts, in order to find it, to labour fruitlessly under the law, in order to obtain it. We behold it: it is revealed, it is here, in Jesus Christ. He who possesses Christ possesses that life.

129 It will be found that, when grace to us is spoken of in John’s writings, he speaks of the Father and the Son; when the nature of God or our responsibility, he says God. John 3 and 1 John 4 may seem exceptions, but are not. It is what God is as such, not personal action and relationship in grace.

130 He who had seen Him had seen the Father; but here the apostle speaks of a message and the revelation of His nature.

131 It is not said “has “nor “will.” It does not refer to time, but to its efficacy. As I might say such a medicine cures the ague. It is its efficacy.

132 When speaking of sin, the apostle speaks in the present tense, “we have “; when speaking of sinning, he speaks in the past. He does not take for granted we are going on doing it. It has been a question whether the apostle speaks of first coming to the Lord, or subsequent failures. I answer, he speaks in an abstract and absolute way: confession brings through grace, forgiveness. If it

is our first coming to God, it is forgiveness; it is in the full and absolute sense. I am forgiven with God: He remembers my sins no more. If it is subsequent failure, honesty of heart always confesses, then it is forgiveness as regards the government of God, and the present condition and relationship of my soul with Him. But the apostle, as everywhere, speaks absolutely and of the principle.

133 Here the subject is communion, and hence actual failure is spoken of j in the Hebrews, we have seen, it is access to God and we are “perfected for ever,” and priesthood is for mercy and help, not for sins, save the great act of atonement.

134 Fundamentally they are not different. This is affirmed in verse 7:”The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.” One might say with perfect truth that the commandment is the word of Christ; but I question if it could be said that the word is the commandment. And this makes one conscious of the difference. The contrast of verses 4 and 5 is remarkable, and has its source in the possession, and the intelligent and complete consciousness of the possession, of the divine life, according to the word, or its non-possession. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; for this truth is only that which the word reveals. And if we live of the nature of which the word of Christ is the expression, and thus by the word know Him, we obey that word. In another aspect, if we are in possession of this life, partakers of the divine nature, the love of God is in us; we have the commandments of Christ, His word, the perfect love of God, a walk according to the walk of Christ, the communication of the life of Christ so that

the commandment is true in Him and in us, the walk in the light, the love of our brother. How rich a chain of blessing! The pretensions here spoken of are—to know Christ, to abide in Him, to be in the light. The proof that the first pretension is justified is obedience. Then, if we abide in Christ (which we know by keeping His word), we ought to walk as He walked. That the last pretension is a true one is proved by love to our brother. In the second, the walk is maintained at all the height of the walk of Christ, as our duty: but this walk is not presented as a proof that we abide in Him, that we keep His word. Observe that it is not said, “We know that we believe “—this is not the question here; but, “We know that we are in him.”

Let me add here, that the apostle never uses these proofs, as they are so commonly used, to say, “hereby we doubt.” It is quite certain from verses 12, 13, that he treats them as all forgiven or he would not have written, and as having the Spirit of adoption—even the youngest and feeblest. Others sought to make them doubt; and he writes that their hearts might be assured before God, that they might not be seduced into doubting, as if they had not a full Christ and a full Christianity— eternal life. It was the means of keeping and holding fast assurance when they had it, when they might have been shaken, not of obtaining it. They were forgiven, they were sons. When others would make them doubt, he writes that they may be fully assured that they have no reason to doubt.

135 This, I doubt not, is the true meaning of John 8:25. “In the principle of my nature, in my being, that which I am saying to you.” That which He said was essentially and completely that which He was. That which He was is

that which He said. Now it is this life which is imparted to us; but it was the love of God among men and in man. And this life being our life, and the word of Christ giving us the knowledge of it, and this word being kept, His love is realised in us in all its extent.

136 The force of the word is “the darkness is passing and the true light already shines.” There is much darkness yet in the world. As to the light, it has actually shone.

137 The reader may compare here, with much instruction, what is said in Ephesians 4:17 to 5:12, where these two names of God, the only ones used to reveal His nature, are also used to shew our path and the true character of the Christian; only according to that which the Holy Ghost gives by Paul—the counsels and work of God in Christ. In John it is more the nature.

138 I have noticed, farther on, the striking way in which God and Christ are spoken of as one Being or Person, not as doctrine as to the two natures, but Christ is before the apostle’s mind, and He is spoken of in the same sentence, now as God, now as appearing as man. Thus in chapter 2:28 He comes. In verse 29 the righteous man is born of Him, and we are children of God. But the world did not know Him. Now it is Christ on earth. Chapter 3:2 we are children of God, but in the same verse He appears and we are like Him. But what makes this yet more wonderful is that we are identified with Him too. We are called children because that is His title and relationship. The world does not know us, for it did not know Him. We know we shall be like Him when He appears. We are given the same place here and there. (Compare chap. 5:20.)

139 See previous note.

140 John uses habitually the word “children,” not “sons,” as the more distinctly expressing that we are of the same family. We are as Christ before God and in the world, and so will be when He appears.

141 In Romans 2:12, the word is used in contrast with law-breaking, or sinning under law. That is, the Greek word here used for what is translated “transgression of the law “is that used for sinning without law, in contrast with sinning under law, and being judged by it. I do not dissemble that this changing what is a definition of sin is a very serious thing.

142 Here dwelling in Him comes first, because it is practical realisation in an obedient heart. His dwelling in us is then pursued apart as known by the Spirit given to us, to guard against being misled by evil spirits. In chapter 4:7, he resumes the indwelling in connection with the love of God.

143 Note, it is not “was.” It is never said in scripture, He left the Father’s bosom; but “the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father.” As so knowing God, He reveals Him on earth.

144 This gives us too, in their highest character and subject, the difference between the gospel and epistle.

145 The only expression in the word that has some resemblance to it is “the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father.” This is addressed to a numerous corporation in quite another sense.

146 Righteousness and holiness suppose reference to other things; thus, evil to be known, rejection of evil, and judgment. Love, though exercised towards others, is

what He is in Himself. The other essential name that God bears is “light.” We are said to be “light in the Lord “as partakers of the divine nature; not love, which is, though the divine nature, sovereign in grace. We cannot therefore be said to be love. (See Eph. 4, 5.)

147 It is striking to see that he does not say. We ought to love Him because He first loved us; but we love Him. We cannot know and enjoy love to us without loving. The sense of love to us is always love. It is not known and valued without its being there. My sense of love in another is love to him. We ought to love the brethren, because it is not their love to us which is the spring of it, though it may nourish it in this way. But we love God because He first loved us.

148 Even the orderly reception of the Holy Ghost was so (see Acts 2:38).

149 I have already noticed this passage as being a kind of key to the way we really know God, and dwell in Him. It speaks of God as Him we know, in whom we are, explaining it by saying, that it is in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; only here, as follows in the text, it is truth and not love.

2 John

The second and third epistles of John insist on the truth. The second warns the faithful against the reception of those who do not teach the doctrine of Christ, especially the truth respecting the Person of Christ. The third encourages believers to receive and help those who teach it. Accordingly they both (and the second especially) lay stress on “the truth.”

The apostle loved this elect lady, “in the truth”; as did also all those who had known the truth, and that for the truth’s sake. He wished her blessing in truth and in love. He rejoiced that he had found some who were her children walking in the truth. He desired that there should be mutual love among Christians, but this was love, that they should keep the commandments; for many deceivers were come into the world. Now whosoever transgressed, and did not abide in the doctrine of Christ, had not God. He ends his epistle, of which we have given an almost complete summary, by exhorting this lady, in case any one should come and not bring this doctrine, not to receive him into our house, nor say to him, “God bless you, or be with you,” or “I salute you.” For to do so would be to make herself a partaker in the evil he was doing.

The false doctrine which was abroad at that moment was the denial of the truth of Christ come in the flesh; but the apostle says in a general way that, if any one transgressed and did not abide in the doctrine of Christ, he had not God.

We learn several important things in this little epistle. The mission of a man who went about preaching was

never brought into question, but the doctrine which he brought; if he brought sound doctrine he was welcome.

A woman having the word—as this epistle, for example—was capable of judging his doctrine, and responsible to do so. Inexorable rigour was to be maintained, if the doctrine as to the Person of Christ was touched. The door was to be shut against whoever falsified it. They were not even to say to him, “I salute you”; for they who did so became partakers of his evil work. It would be to help on the deceits of Satan.

Moreover the semblance of love which does not maintain the truth, but accommodates itself to that which is not the truth, is not love according to God. It is the taking advantage of the name of love in order to help on the seductions of Satan. In the last days the test of true love is the maintenance of the truth. God would have us love one another; but the Holy Ghost, by whose power we receive this divine nature, and who pours the love of God into our hearts is the Spirit of truth; and His office is to glorify Christ. Therefore it is impossible that a love which can put up with a doctrine that falsifies Christ, and which is indifferent to it, can be of the Holy Ghost—still less so, if such indifference be set up as the proof of that love.

The doctrine of the reward and crown of glory, which the labourer possesses in the fruits of his ministry, is presented in a very strong light in verse 8. This second epistle puts Christians on their guard against all that is equivocal with respect to the Person of Christ; and exhorts to an unwavering firmness on this point.

3 John

The third epistle encourages the believer to the exercise of hospitality, whether towards the known brethren or strangers, and to all benevolent care in furthering their journey when departing, provided that they come with the truth and for the truth's sake without salary or provision. Gaius received them, as it appears, and was helpful to them both in his own house and on their journey. Diotrephes, on the contrary, did not love these strangers, who went about, it is said, without a formal mission and without any visible means of subsistence. They had gone forth for the Lord's sake and had received nothing from the Gentiles. If they in reality came out of love to that name, one did well to receive them.

Again the apostle insists on the truth, as characterising real love: "Whom I love in the truth," he says to Gaius. He rejoiced when the brethren (those, I imagine, whom Gaius had received into his house and helped on their journey) testified of the truth that was in him, as in effect he walked in the truth. The apostle had no greater joy than that of hearing that his children walked in the truth. In receiving those who went forth to preach the truth, they helped the truth itself; they were co-workers with it. Diotrephes would have nothing to do with this; he not only refused to receive these itinerant preachers, but excommunicated those who did so. He claimed authority for himself. The apostle would remember it. It was their duty to do good. "He that doeth good is of God."

He goes so far, with regard to the truth, as to say, that the truth itself bore witness to Demetrius. I suppose that the latter had propagated it, and that the establishment and confirmation of the truth everywhere—at least where he had laboured—was a testimony with regard to himself.

This insistence on the truth, as the test for the last days, is very remarkable; and so is this preaching itinerary by persons who took nothing of the Gentiles when they came forth, leaving it to God to cause them to be received of those who had the truth at heart, the truth being their only passport among Christians, and the only means by which the apostle could guard the faithful. It appears that they were of the Jewish race, for he says, “receiving nothing of the Gentiles,” the apostle thus making the distinction. I notice this, because, if it be so, the force of the expression “and not for ours only “(i John 2:2) becomes simple and evident, which it is not to every one. The apostle, as Paul does, makes the difference of us, Jews, though one in Christ. We may also remark that the apostle addressed the assembly, and not Diotrephes, its head; and that it was this leader who, loving pre-eminence, resisted the apostle’s words, which the assembly, as it appears, were not inclined to do.

Gaius persevered in his godly course, in spite of the ecclesiastical authority (whatever may have been its right or pretended right) which Diotrephes evidently exercised: for he cast persons out of the assembly.

When the apostle came, he would (like Paul) manifest his real power. He did not own in himself an ecclesiastical authority to remedy these things by a command. These epistles are very remarkable in this

respect. With regard to those who went about preaching, the only means he had, even in the case of a woman, was to call her attention to the truth. The authority of the preacher lay altogether in that. His competency was another matter. The apostle knew no authority which sanctioned their mission, the absence of which would prove it to be false or unauthorised. The whole question of their reception lay in the doctrine which they brought. The apostle had no other way to judge of the authority of their mission: there was then no other; for, had there been any, that authority would have flowed from him. He would have been able to say, “Where are the proofs of their mission? “He knew none but this—do they bring the truth? If not, do not salute them. If they bring the truth, you do well to receive them, in spite of all the Diotrephes in the world.

Jude

The epistle of Jude develops the history of the apostasy of Christendom, from the earliest elements that crept into the assembly to corrupt it, down to its judgment at the appearing of our Lord, but as moral apostasy by turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. In John they are gone out; here they have crept in, corrupting. It is a very short epistle, and containing instruction presented with much brevity, and with the energetic rapidity of the prophetic style, but of immense weight and extensive bearing. The evil which had stolen in among Christians would not cease until destroyed by judgment.

We have already noticed this difference between the epistle of Jude and the second of Peter, that Peter speaks of sin, Jude of apostasy, the departure of the assembly from its primitive state before God. Departure from the holiness of faith is the subject that Jude treats. He does not speak of outward separation. He views Christians as a number of persons professing a religion on the earth, and originally true to that which they professed. Certain persons had crept in among them unawares. They fed themselves without fear at the love-feasts of the Christians; and although the Lord would come attended by all His saints (so that the faithful will have been already caught up), yet in the judgment these persons are still accounted to be in the same class—"to convince," he says, "all that are ungodly among them." They may indeed be in open rebellion at the moment of judgment, but they were individuals who had once

formed a part of the company of Christians; they were really apostates, enemies left behind.

When it is said, “These be they who separate themselves,” it does not mean openly from the visible assembly, for he speaks of them as in the midst of it; but they set themselves apart, being in it, as more excellent than others, like the Pharisees among the Jews. Jude points them out as being in the midst of the Christians, and presenting themselves as such. The judgment falls upon this class of persons; the taking up of the saints has left them behind for judgment.

Jude begins by declaring the faithfulness of God and the character of His care for the saints, which answers to the prayer of Jesus in John 17. They were called ones, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. Happy testimony! which magnifies the grace of God. “Holy Father,” our Lord said, “keep them”: and these were sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. The apostle speaks with a view to the forsaking by many of the holy faith; he addresses those who were kept.

He had purposed writing to them of the salvation common to all Christians; but he found it needful to exhort them to stand fast, to contend for the faith once given to the saints. For already was that faith being corrupted by the denial of the rights of Christ to be Lord and Master; and thus also, by giving the reins to self-will, they abused grace, and turned it into a principle of dissoluteness. These are the two elements of the evil which the instruments of Satan introduced, the rejection of the authority of Christ (not His name): and the abuse of grace, in order to indulge their own lusts. In both

cases it was the will of man, which they set free from everything that bridled it. The expression “Lord God” points out this character of God. “Lord” here is not the word generally used; it is despot; that is, “master.”

Having pointed out the evil which had secretly crept in, the epistle goes on to shew them that the judgment of God is executed upon those who do not walk according to the position in which God had originally placed them.

The evil was, not only that certain men had crept in among them—in itself an immense evil, because the action of the Holy Ghost is thereby hindered among Christians—but that, definitely, the entire testimony before God, the vessel which held this testimony, would become (as had been already the case with the Jews) corrupt to such a degree that it would bring down upon itself the judgment of God. And it has become thus corrupt.

This is the great principle of the downfall of the testimony, established by God in the world, by means of the corruption of the vessel which contains it, and which bears its name. In pointing out moral corruption as characterising the state of professors, Jude cites, as examples of this downfall and of its judgment, the case of Israel, who fell in the wilderness (with the exception of two, Joshua and Caleb), and that of the angels who, not having kept their first estate, are reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

This example suggests to him another case, that of Sodom and Gomorrha, which presents immorality and corruption as the cause of judgment. Their condition is a perpetual testimony here on earth to their judgment.

These ungodly men, with the name of Christians, are but dreamers; for the truth is not in them. The two principles which we have noticed are developed in them: filthiness of the flesh, and contempt for authority. The latter manifests itself in a second form, namely, the license of the tongue, the self-will that manifests itself by speaking evil of dignities. Whereas, the text says, the archangel Michael durst not rail even against the devil, but with the gravity of one who acts according to God, appealed to the judgment of God Himself.

Jude then sums up the three kinds or characters of the evil and of estrangement from God; first, that of nature, the opposition of the flesh to the testimony of God and His true people, the impetus which this enmity gives to the will of the flesh; in the second place, ecclesiastical evil, teaching error for reward, knowing all the while that it is contrary to the truth and against the people of God; third, open opposition, rebellion, against the authority of God in His true King and Priest.

At the time when Jude wrote his epistle, those persons whom Satan introduced into the church in order to stifle its spiritual life and to bring on the result which the Spirit views prophetically, were dwelling in the midst of the saints, took part in those pious feasts at which they gathered together in token of their brotherly love. They were “spots” in those “feasts of charity,” feeding without fear in the pastures of the faithful. The Holy Ghost denounces them energetically. They were doubly dead, by nature and by their apostasy; without fruit, bearing fruit that perished, as out of season; plucked up by the roots; foaming out everywhere their own shame; wandering stars, reserved for darkness. Of old the Spirit had announced by the mouth of Enoch the judgment

that should be executed upon them. This presents a very important aspect of the instruction here given; namely, that this evil which had crept in among the Christians would continue and still be found when the Lord should return for judgment. He would come with the myriads of His saints to execute judgment upon all the ungodly among them for their acts of iniquity and their ungodly words which they had spoken against Him. There would be a continuous system of evil from those in the apostles' time till the Lord came. This is a solemn witness to what would go on among Christians.

It is quite remarkable to see the inspired writer identifying the favourers of licentiousness with the rebels who will be the object of judgment in the last day. It is the same spirit, the same work of the enemy, although restrained for the moment, which will ripen for the judgment of God. Alas for the assembly! It is, however, but the universal progression of man. Only that, grace having fully revealed God and delivered from the law, there must now be either holiness of heart and soul, and the delights of obedience under the perfect law of liberty, or else licence and open rebellion. In this the proverb is true, that the corruption of that which is the most excellent is the worst of corruptions. We must add here, that the admiration of men, in order to gain advantage by them, is another characteristic feature of these apostates. It is not to God that they look.

Now the apostles had already warned the saints that these mockers would come, walking after their own lusts, exalting themselves, not having the Spirit, but being in the state of nature.

Practical exhortation follows for those who were preserved. According to the energy of spiritual life, and the power of the Spirit of God, they were by grace to build themselves up, and to keep themselves in the communion of God. The faith is, to the believer, a most holy faith; he loves it, because it is so; it puts him into relationship and communion with God Himself. That which he has to do in the painful circumstances of which the apostle speaks (whatever may be the measure of their development), is to build himself up in this most holy faith. He cultivates communion with God, and profits through grace by the revelations of His love. The Christian has his own proper sphere of thought, in which he hides himself from the evil that surrounds him, and grows in the knowledge of God from whom nothing can separate him. His own portion is always the more evident to him, the more the evil increases. His communion with God is in the Holy Ghost, in whose power he prays, and who is the link between God and his soul; and his prayers are according to the intimacy of this relationship, and animated by the intelligence and energy of the Spirit of God.

Thus they kept themselves in the consciousness, the communion, and the enjoyment of the love of God. They abode in His love while sojourning here below, but, as their end, they were waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. In effect when one sees what are the fruits of the heart of man, one feels that it must be His mercy which presents us without spot before His face in that day for eternal life with a God of holiness. No doubt it is His unchangeable faithfulness, but, in the presence of so much evil, one thinks rather of the mercy. Compare, in the same circumstances, what

Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:16. It is mercy which has made the difference between those that fall and those that stand (compare Ex. 33:19). We must also distinguish between those who are led away. There are some who are only drawn aside by others, others in whom the lusts of a corrupt heart are working; and where we see the latter we must manifest hatred to everything that testifies this corruption, as a thing that is unbearable.

The Spirit of God in this epistle does not bring forward the efficacy of this redemption. He is occupied with the crafty devices of the enemy, with his efforts to connect the actings of the human will with the profession of the grace of God, and thus to bring about the corruption of the assembly, and the downfall of Christians, by putting them on the road to apostasy and judgment. Confidence is in God; to Him the sacred writer addresses himself in closing his epistle, as he thinks of the faithful to whom he was writing. Unto Him, he says, who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us unspotted before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

It is important to observe the way in which the Spirit of God speaks in the epistles of a power that can keep us from every fall, and unblamable; so that a thought only of sin is never excusable. It is not that the flesh is not in us, but that, with the Holy Ghost acting in the new man, it is never necessary that the flesh should act or influence our life (compare 1 Thess. 5:22). We are united to Jesus: He represents us before God, He is our righteousness. But at the same time He who in His perfection is our righteousness is also our life; so that the Spirit aims at the manifestation of this same perfection, practical perfection, in the daily life. He who says “I abide in Him,” ought to walk as He walked. The

Lord also says, “Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

There is progress in this. It is Christ risen who is the source of this life in us, which ascends again towards its source, and which views the risen and glorified Christ, to whom we shall be conformed in glory, as its end and aim (see Phil. 3). But the effect of this is, that we have no other aim: “this one thing I do.” Thus, whatever may be the degree of realisation, the motive is always perfect. The flesh does not come in at all as a motive, and in this sense we are blameless.

The Spirit then—since Christ who is our righteousness is our life—links our life to the final result of an unblamable condition before God. The conscience knows by grace that absolute perfection is ours, because Christ is our righteousness; but the soul which rejoices in this before God is conscious of union with Him, and seeks the realisation of that perfection according to the power of the Spirit, by whom we are thus united to the Head. To Him who can accomplish this, preserving us from every kind of fall, our epistle ascribes all glory and dominion throughout all ages.

That which is peculiarly striking in the epistle of Jude is that he pursues the corruption of the assembly from the creeping in of some unawares on to its final judgment, shewing withal that it is not arrested but passes through its various phases to that day.

Revelation

As regards Peter and Paul, we have scriptural authority for regarding them as the apostles respectively of the circumcision and of the uncircumcision. Peter and the twelve remained at Jerusalem when the disciples were scattered, and, continuing (though God was careful to maintain unity) the work of Christ in the remnant of Israel, gathered into an assembly on earth, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Paul, having received the ministry of the assembly, as of the gospel to every creature under heaven (Col. 1), as a wise master-builder, lays the foundation. Peter sets us off as pilgrims on our journey to follow Christ risen towards the inheritance above. Paul, in the full development of his doctrine (though owning this, as in Philippians 3), shews us the saints sitting in heavenly places in Christ, heirs of all which He is heir of. All this was dispensational, and it is full of instruction. But John holds a different place. He does not enter on dispensation; nor, though once or twice stating the fact (as John 13:1; 14:1; 17:24; 20:17), does he take the saint, nor even the Lord Himself, up to heaven. Jesus, for him, is a divine Person, the Word made flesh manifesting God and His Father, eternal life come down to earth. The epistle of John treats the question of our partaking of this life, and its character.

But at the close of the Gospel, after stating the sending of the Comforter on His going away, Christ opens to the disciples (though in a mysterious way) the continuation of God’s dealings with the earth, of which John ministerially is the representative, linking the manifestation of Christ on earth at His first coming with

His manifestation at His second; Christ's Person, and eternal life in Him, being the abiding security and living seed of God, when dispensationally all was corrupted, and in confusion and decay. If all were in disorder outwardly, eternal life was still the same.

The destruction of Jerusalem formed a momentous epoch as to these things, because the Jewish assembly, formed as such at Pentecost, had ceased (nay, it had even before); only the judicial act was then accomplished. Christians had been warned to leave the camp. The breach of Christianity with Judaism was consummated. Christ could no longer take up the assembly, established in the remnant of the Jews, as His own seat of earthly authority.150 But alas! the assembly, as Paul had established it too, had already fallen from its first estate—could in no sense take up the fallen inheritance of Israel. All seek their own, says Paul, not the things of Jesus Christ. All they of Asia—Ephesus, the beloved scene where all Asia had heard the word of God—had forsaken him. They who had been specially brought with full intelligence into the assembly's place could not hold it in the power of faith. Indeed, the mystery of iniquity was at work before this, and was to go on and grow until the hindrance to the final apostasy was removed.

Here, in this state of universal declension and ruin, John's ministry comes in. Stability was in the Person of Christ, for eternal life first, but for the ways of God upon earth too. If the assembly was spued out of His mouth, He was the faithful witness, the beginning of the creation of God. Let us trace the links of this in his Gospel. In John 20, as elsewhere noticed in detail, we have a picture of God's ways from the resurrection of

Christ till we come to the remnant of Israel in the latter days, represented by Thomas's look on the pierced One and believing by seeing. In chapter 21 we have, besides the remnant, the full millennial gathering. Then at the close of the chapter, the special ministry of Peter and John is pointed out, though mysteriously. The sheep of Jesus of the circumcision are confided to Peter; but this ministry was to close like Christ's. The assembly would not be established on this ground, any more than Israel. There was no tarrying here till Christ came.151 Peter's ministry in fact was closed, and the circumcision assembly left shepherdless, before the destruction of Jerusalem put an end to all such connection for ever. Peter then asks as to John. The Lord answers, confessedly mysteriously, but putting off, as that which did not concern Peter who was to follow Him, the closing of John's ministry, prolonging it in possibility till Christ came. Now, in fact, the Bridegroom tarried; but the service and ministry of John by the word (which was all that was to remain, and no apostle in personal care) did go on to the return of Christ.

John was no master-builder like Paul—had no dispensation committed to him. He was connected with the assembly in its earthly structure like Peter, not in the Ephesus or heavenly one; he was not the minister of the circumcision, but carried on the earthly system among the Gentiles, only holding fast the Person of Christ. His special place was testimony to the Person of Christ come to earth with divine title over it—power over all flesh. This did not break the links with Israel, as Paul's ministry did, but raised the power which held all together in the Person of Christ to a height which carried it through any hidden time, or hidden power, on

to its establishment over the world at the end; it did not exclude Israel as such, but enlarged the scene of the exercise of Christ's power so as to set it over the world, and did not establish it in Israel as its source, though it might establish Israel itself in its own place from a heavenly source of power.

What place does the assembly then hold in this ministry of John, found as it is in the book of Revelation? None in its Pauline character, save in one phrase, coming in after the Revelation is closed, where its true place in Christ's absence is indicated (chap. 22:17). We have the saints at the time, in their own conscious relationship to Christ, in reference, too, to the royal and priestly place to His God and Father, in which they are associated with Himself. But John's ministerial testimony, as to the assembly, views it as the outward assembly on earth152 in its state of decay—Christ judging this—and the true assembly, the capital city and seat of God's government over the world, at the end, but in glory and grace. It is an abode, and where God dwells and the Lamb. All this facilitates our intelligence of the objects and bearing of the book. The assembly has failed; the Gentiles, grafted in by faith, have not continued in God's goodness. The Ephesian assembly, the intelligent vessel, and expression of what the assembly of God was, had left its first estate, and unless it repented, the candlestick was to be removed. The Ephesus of Paul becomes the witness on earth of decay and of removal out of God's sight, even as Israel had been removed. God's patience would be shewn towards the assembly as it had been towards Israel; but the assembly would not maintain God's testimony in the world any more than Israel had. John does maintain this testimony, ministerially judging

the assemblies by Christ's word,153 and then the world from the throne, till Christ comes and takes to Himself His great power and reigns. During this transition-dealing of the throne the heavenly saints are seen on high. When Christ comes, they come with Him.

The first part, then, of the epistles of John is the continuation, so to speak, of the Gospel before the last two dispensational chapters; the Revelation, that of these last two chapters (20, 21), where, Christ being risen and no ascension given, the dispensational dealings of God are largely intimated in the circumstances which occur; while it is shewn at the same time that He could not personally set up the kingdom then. He must ascend first. The two short epistles shew us that truth (truth as to His Person) was the test of true love, and to be held fast when what was antichristian came in; and the free liberty of the ministration of the truth to be held fast against assumed ecclesiastical or clerical authority, as contrasted with the assembly. The apostle had written to the assembly. Diotrephes rejected free ministry.

I now turn to the book itself.

The Revelation is one belonging to Jesus Christ, which God gave Him, and He signifies it to John. Though God over all blessed for ever, He is here seen as Son of man, the rejected Messiah or Lamb, and so Head over all things. This fact, that the revelation is one confided to Him, is important, because it at once makes it the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, being communicated by Jesus, and given to Him by God. This testimony of Jesus and word of God comes as a vision to John, who bare record of all he saw. All of it is prophetic

in character, not the Spirit of God the messenger of the Father and of the Son's grace to the assembly in its own place—a direct inspired communication to the assembly itself for itself as in its own right place—but a prophetic revelation to John about it as in the world, and about the world itself.

The assembly being already in decay and to be removed, whatever the delay of grace, the time was at hand, and the rejection of the assembly on earth to be taken as a starting-point. Another system was to be set up. The apostle had not his face turned towards the assemblies at all, but his back. The mind of the Spirit is towards Christ's taking the kingdom. Still Christ was yet amongst them, but as Son of man, the character in which He judges and inherits the world. The apostle turns and sees Him. Still it behoved, if he was recounting the coming dealing with the world in judgment, to notice by the bye "the things that are." By giving them in seven contemporary churches, no time was necessary; it left the final results as at the door, for they were in the last days, yet it gave, if there was delay, opportunity for a full moral picture of the whole of the assembly's history. I see in this only the wisdom of the Spirit, and exactly the character of John's ministry. "If I will that he tarry till I come."

I cannot doubt then for a moment that (while professedly of universal application for every one that had an ear, not an address to the general conscience of the assembly) the seven assemblies represent the history of Christendom, the assembly as under man's responsibility, the fact of the judgment of the world coming afterwards on its close (the assemblies being "the things that are ") and the character of events,

beginning with the assembly leaving its first love, and ending with holding fast till He comes, and with being spued out of Christ's mouth. The adoption of the number seven, which cannot mean completeness at the same time because the states are different; the reference to Christ's coming; the reference to the great tribulation to come on all the earth in the letter to Philadelphia; the clear object of warning the assembly till Christ came, the world being then in scene for judgment: all leave no cloud upon the conclusion that the seven churches are successive phases of the professing assembly's history, though not exactly consecutive (the fourth going on to the end; new phases then commencing, and going on to the end collaterally also).154 But though the assembly be thus spoken of, God Himself appears here as the administrator of the world, even when addressing the assembly; and Christ as man coming under Him to this purpose, the Holy Ghost being noticed as the direct agent of power in the sevenfold perfection in which it is exercised. It is not the Father and the Son, but God who is, yet who embraces past and future in His being, and is never inconsistent with Himself, making good in time all in which He has announced Himself in the past. The form of this however is peculiar here. It is not merely the abstract idea of Jehovah, who was, and is, and is to come. He is first announced by His present absolute existence, "from him who is," the "I am," God Himself; and then to connect Himself with previous dealings (not present relationships) declares that He is the One who was (had revealed Himself in previous ages to the earth or to men, to the Abrahams and Moses's of old time), and at the same time was the coming One who would make good everything revealed of and by Himself. Jesus Christ (who comes last as the Man in immediate

connection with God's witness to, and government of, the earth) is presented as the faithful witness—as He was personally on earth—of God; as risen from the dead (but no ascension or headship of the assembly), taking all in this character, not after the flesh; and lastly, in government not yet made good, the Prince of the kings of the earth.

The saints then express their own consciousness of what He has done for them, yet still in reference to the kingdom, not as the body or bride, or their own heavenly joys, but the highest possible as regards the given glory and place. This is the necessary consequence of the consciousness of a near and blessed relationship. Whatever the glory of the One we are in relationship with, it is what He is for oneself, one's own nearness to Him, that comes to the mind when the glory is declared. Were a general to march in triumph into a town, the feeling of a child or wife would be, 'That is my father,'—'That is my husband.' Here the feeling, though of this character, is more unselfish. "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." It is His love to us which is celebrated, still with the personal feeling "us." The saints know what He has done for them, and further what He has made them. His love is perfect. King and Priest are His highest characters here: nearest to God in power downwards, and in approaching Him upwards. He has made us kings and priests to God and His Father: to Him be glory! Such is the saints' thought when He is spoken of. He loved us, has cleansed us, and given us a place with Himself. This flows out the instant He is named. It is the answer of heart when He is announced, before any communication takes place. His having done this is not announced; it is the saints' own

consciousness.155 As to others, all must be told. The next point, the first announced, is His appearing to the world. No direct communication to the assembly for its own sake—the book is not that. Here the assembly has that in its own consciousness only, as we have seen. Behold! He cometh with clouds; every eye shall see Him, the Jews too who pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. His appearing is in judgment.

We then find, what is so remarkable in John, the mixing up in expression of God and Christ. Verse 8 cannot be said to be one or the other. It is Christ; but it is Christ Jehovah, Almighty, the Lord; who is, and who was, and who is to come; the first and the last (compare chap. 22:12, 13).

Thus, we have the saints of these days; Christ's appearing to judgment; He is God, the first and the last. Alpha and Omega; the complete circle of position from John's day to the end. The practical position which John takes with all the saints, is "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." He belongs to the kingdom, but must wait while Christ waits, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. The generic name given to testimony applies to all his ministry as well as to the prophecy—the word of God and the testimony of Jesus: only one might have thought that prophecy was not this last, as it was not to the assembly about itself from its Head; but the Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

Such is the introduction to this book. We now enter on its contents. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. It is his place and privilege however then, as a Christian, which is spoken of, not the prophetic period into which

he entered. In the day of resurrection—his own place—the day on which Christians meet, the apostle, removed from the society of Christians, still enjoyed the special elevating power of the Holy Ghost, though alone; and is thus used of God, allowed to be banished for the purpose, for what He could not, in an ordinary way, have communicated to the assembly for its edification. The persecuting emperor little thought what he was giving to us when he banished the apostle; no more than Augustus, in his political plans as to the census of the empire, knew he was sending a poor carpenter to Bethlehem, with his espoused wife, that Christ might be born there; or the Jews and Pilate's soldiers, that they were sending the thief to heaven, when they broke his legs in heartless respect for their own superstitions or ordinances. God's ways are behind the scenes; but He moves all the scenes which He is behind. We have to learn this, and let Him work, and not think much of man's busy movements: they will accomplish God's. The rest of them all perish and disappear. We have only peacefully to do His will.

The same voice that afterwards called John up to heaven, he now hears behind him on earth—the voice of the Son of man. It summons his attention with power; and turning to see the voice, as Moses towards the bush, he sees, not the image of God's presence in Israel, but the vessels of God's light in the earth, and a complete summary of it all, and, in the midst of them, Christ as Son of man. We find, thus, in the Revelation, God's whole history of the world, or of what is of Him in it, from the first decay of the assembly to the new heavens and new earth. But it was impossible for God to set aside the present expectation of Christ, or to justify the

assembly in its careless but sinful thought, “My Lord delayeth His coming.” Hence, as always, this history, and especially that of the assembly, is given in a way which leaves time out altogether. The moral progress of the assembly is given in pictures of the state of the existing assemblies selected for that purpose, beginning with its first decline, and ending with its entire rejection. Being taken up as assemblies, the general principle of responsibility is in view, and the assembly viewed, not as the infallibly blessed body of Christ, but such as that it may be rejected and set aside on earth; for a local assembly and the external visible assembly clearly can.

These assemblies are seen as distinct light-bearers; that is, in their place of service, or rather position of witness in the world. They are viewed in their own proper character as of God; as set by Him in the world, they are of gold. He may take them away because they give a dim, or no true light or witness for God; but the thing taken away was founded in divine righteousness, and founded originally by a divine hand.

But the Spirit first occupies itself with the character of Him who stood amongst them. First, we get His actual position, before stating what He was. He stood as Son of man. We have not Him here as Head of the one body, nor even as heavenly Intercessor; nor have we the Christ, of course (that is, the Jewish character of the Lord). It will be found that these are just the characters of Christ omitted also in the first chapter of John’s Gospel. John sees Him in the wide character in which He is set over all the works of God’s hand, and Heir of all promises and purposes of God to man according to divine righteousness. He is not the Son of man in service. His garment is down to His feet, and He has the girdle of

divine righteousness about His breasts. This is His character.

We have then His qualities or attributes. First, He is the Ancient of days. In Daniel the same truth comes out. The Son of man is brought to the Ancient of days; but, farther on in the chapter, it is the Ancient of days who comes. The Son of man is Jehovah. This characterises all the testimony. The King of kings and Lord of lords shews Him:156 but, when He comes, we find that He is King of kings and Lord of lords.157 But in this glory He has the attributes of judgment—eyes of fire—that which pierces into everything, and fire is ever the sign of judgment. This was its piercing, searching character: His feet, the firmness with which sin was met; for brass is righteousness, viewed, not as intrinsically in God to be approached, but as dealing with man, in his responsibility as man. The mercy-seat was gold, the altar and laver brass; but there it was as an altar, that is, dealing with sin for man, a sacrifice, though fire was there, but here the burning furnace of judgment. The voice was the sign of power and majesty.

Next, we have official supremacy. He held all that was subordinate authority in light and order, here spoken of as regards the assembly, in His right hand, in His power. He had the power of judgment by the word, and supreme authority— the sun—in the fulness of its highest character. We have His personal glory as Jehovah; His qualities as divine Judge; and His supreme official position.

But, He was not less the Redeemer, the gracious securer in blessing of them that were His. John (as ever in prophetic vision of Jehovah, for it is not the Spirit of

adoption here) falls at His feet as one dead. So Daniel; so in spirit Isaiah (chap. 6); but His power sustains the saint, does not destroy him. He lays His right hand on John himself, declares Himself the first and the last, Jehovah Himself, but withal the same that died in love and has complete power over death and hades; the deliverer from it, not the subjecter to it. He has risen out of death and hades, and has the keys—full power over them —divine power or support; and He who died and rose again, and lives for ever even as man, does so, not simply in the power of divine life in man, but of victory over all that man was subject to by sin and infirmity.

This is the position He here takes with John His servant, and with the assemblies respectively. We shall see that the state of the latter assemblies brings out other characters known only to the opened eye of faith. These were what John had seen, and which he was to write. Then as regards prophetic facts, he was to write the things that were, the state of these various assemblies as the setting forth historically of the assembly's various state—a history; and the things which should be after them (that is, when the assembly's history has closed on earth). The whole assembly therefore, is thus, to the Spirit, the present time—the "things that are." The future was what came after it, God's dealings with the world. This, while it left the coming of the Lord, or preparatory prophetic events in immediate expectation, left, if there was delay (and there was to be), the period undefined, and the expectation, though prolonged, still a present one. We may remark that we have the personal glory of Christ here, the position as to the assemblies accompanying it. He is not personally revealed as Son of man, that is, as taking the Son of man's place: only He

who is Ancient of days is so seen as to make us understand that it was one who had that place—was Son of man. Subsequently, in the Apocalypse, it is not His intrinsic personal character, but some relative character or place He takes. Only we have something analogous to this, when the account of future things comes in. As regards the world. He is seen as the Lamb, one whom the world has rejected, but who has redemption right over it. There He is seen with the seven horns and seven eyes—His power over the world, as with the seven stars here as Son of man. These are the things John had seen.

We now pass to “the things that are.” The stars are in Christ’s hand; He speaks of them first; He walks in the midst of the assemblies. The latter are light-bearers, the assemblies or assembly as set in a given position, and viewed as such before God; not what the people became, but what the assembly is in His sight; just as Israel was His people whatever the Israelites became. The stars are that which is held by Christ to give light and have authority, what He holds responsible to this end before Him. It is, in a certain sense, all composing the assembly therefore, and so it is often said in the addresses to the assemblies; but more especially those who stand in responsibility through their connection with Himself, the stars in His hand. They should shine, and influence, and represent Him, each in its place during the night. That the clergy gradually took this place, and in this sense are responsible in it, is quite true; but that is their affair to answer for themselves before the Lord. The Spirit does not so take it here. They assume it as honour; they have it as responsibility. If ever they were called “angels,” it was evidently just this assumption, and taken from this place. Again, it cannot be doubted that

leaders, elders, or others, were in a special place of responsibility, supposing them to be rightly such. In Acts 20 they are so treated; but the Spirit does not so own them here. Christ does not address Himself to elders, nor to the modern notion of a bishop, which did not indeed exist then. Nor is a diocese158 thought of in these addresses. You have not the authorities (elders) spoken of in scripture, of which there were always several; and this passage of scripture cannot be applied to human arrangements as now existing.

What then is the angel? It is not a symbol, properly speaking. The star is the symbol, and it is here seen in Christ's hand. It is (as angel is always used where it is not actually a heavenly or earthly messenger) the mystical representative of one not actually seen. It is so used of Jehovah, so used of a child, so spoken of Peter. Elders may have practically been specially responsible from their position; but the angel represents the assembly, and especially those to whom, from nearness to Christ and communion with Him, or responsibility for it through the operation of His Spirit in them for His service, He looks for the state of His assembly in His sight. No doubt the whole assembly is responsible, and therefore the candlestick is removed when unfaithfulness is brought home to it; but Christ is in immediate communication with these in respect of it—a solemn thought for all who have the good of the assembly at heart.

The way in which the angels and the assemblies are identified, and any distinction in the degree or manner of it, requires a little more detailed attention. That the assemblies are addressed in their general responsibility, in the addresses to the angels, is evident. For it is said,

“What the Spirit saith to the churches.” It is not a private communication to an authority for his direction, as to a Titus or a Timothy, but said to the assemblies; that is, the angel represents their responsibility. So we find distinct parts of them noticed. “The devil shall cast some of you into prison”; “fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer”: “but I have a few things against thee, that thou hast there”: “My faithful martyr who was slain among you”: “But unto you I say, the rest in Thyatira” (so it is to be read). Yet the angel and assembly or candlestick are distinguished: “I will remove thy candlestick out of its place.” “Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel.”

But this separation between the angel and the assembly does not take place in the last three assemblies. The angel is addressed throughout. As to them too it is only said, Christ has the seven stars, not that He holds them in His right hand. In Smyrna and Philadelphia there is no judgment; they were tried, as faithful, and encouraged. As to judgments, or rather warning threats: —in the case of Ephesus, which presents the general fact of the assembly’s first decline, the warning is given that the candlestick would be taken away unless they repented: that the assembly did not, we know from scripture and fact, and these assemblies looked at as a successive history. In Pergamos and Thyatira the offenders are those specifically judged; in the case of Thyatira fearful judgments on Jezebel and those connected with her: she had had time to repent and did not; but here the change of everything is looked for at the Lord’s coming. All this shews the angels to be the representatives of the assemblies, but morally such; Christ’s warning to be addressed to them (as we can

easily understand to be the case in any who had the interest of the assembly at heart), whom Christ trusted with this; but to be so far identified with the assemblies that it concerned all who composed them, while particular judgments were denounced on guilty parties.

We may now enter on the series of particular assemblies; but briefly, in connection with the whole structure of the book, rather than entering into the instructive details, which I have done elsewhere in a series of lectures.

The first great fact is, that the assembly in this world is subject to judgment, and to have its whole existence and place before God as light-bearer in the world set aside; secondly, that God will do this if it departs from its first spiritual energy. This is an immense principle. He has set the assembly to be a true witness of what He has manifested in Jesus; of what He is when Jesus is gone on high. If it be not this, it is a false witness, and it will be set aside. God may have patience, and has blessedly so. He may propose to her to return to her first love, and does; but, if this do not take place, the candlestick is removed, the assembly ceases to be God's light-bearer in the world. The first estate must be maintained, or God's glory and the truth are falsified; and the creature must be set aside. But no mere unsustained creature does this, none as such. Hence all fails and is judged, save as in, or upheld by, the Son of God, the second Man. Ephesus had gone on well in maintaining consistency, but that forgetfulness of self and thinking only of Christ, which are the firstfruits of grace, were gone. As heretofore remarked, there were works of labour and patience; but the faith, hope, and love had in their true energy disappeared. They had rejected the

pretension of false teachers, and laboured and not fainted. All that can be said of them is said to shew Christ's love, and that He is not forgetful of them, or of the good manifested in them. Still they had left their first love; and this unless repented of and the first works done, involved the taking away of the candlestick.

Another important principle is found here, that when the assembly had departed from faithfulness, when collectively it had ceased to be the expression of the love in which God has visited the world, God throws back individuals on the word of God for themselves: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." The assembly is judged, and thus cannot be the security for faith; the individual is called to hear what the Spirit says. The warning of taking away the candlestick here is specially worthy of notice, because there was a great deal the Lord highly approved of—encouraged them by shewing He did; but, for all that, if first love was departed from, the candlestick would be removed.

The character of Christ and promises are general, as the assembly is characteristic of the whole principle on which the assembly stands. Christ has the stars in His right hand and walks amidst the candlesticks. It is not a special character applicable to a special state, but the whole bearing of His position in the midst of the assemblies. The assembly, viewed as having left its first love, is never promised anything. It cannot direct a believer when it comes under reproof and judgment itself. The promise is then to the individual overcomer: a very important principle. The promise given to him that overcomes is the general one—is the contrast to Adam's ruin, but in a higher and better way than that in which

he enjoyed the good which he lost. He that overcomes shall eat of the tree of life. But this is not the tree of life in man's paradise in this world, but the paradise of God Himself. We must remark, too, that it is not as the first Adam now, individually keeping one's first estate, but overcoming. And what is before us to overcome in is, not only the world and its hostilities (though that may be), but within the sphere of the assembly itself. It is the call to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies which gives occasion to the speaking of overcoming. This, in respect of the claim of the assembly to be heard, is an immensely important truth. The message is addressed to the assembly, not by it to individuals, and she is warned of her delinquency, and the individual saint is called to overcome.

The word to Smyrna is short. Whatever the malice and power of Satan, at the utmost, if permitted, he has but the power of death. Christ is First and Last, beyond as before death, God Himself; but more than that, has met and gone through its power. The saints were not to fear. Satan would work, be allowed to sift, to imprison. Let the saints only be faithful to the extreme point of his power; all beyond was beyond him, was Christ's; and the faithful one would receive from Him the crown of life. Tribulation, poverty, the contempt of those who pretended to have the legitimate hereditary claim to be God's people—always the persecutors, be they Jews or Christians— was the portion of the assembly here; and God suffered it. It was really mercy to the declining assembly. Their hope was beyond it all when Christ gave the crown of life. This made the assembly, sliding into the world, or about to do it insensibly through decline of its first love, sensible that the world was in Satan's

hands—was not the rest of saints. But, if the Lord permitted, He limited, the tribulation. All was in His hands. Not only was there the crown for the sufferers, but whoever overcame, his portion was secure: the death of judgment, the second death, would not hurt him.

We now need a closer judgment. Christ appears as the One having the two-edged sword of the word proceeding out of His mouth. It will be remarked here, that, in Smyrna and Pergamos, a special character of Christ applies to a special state. There is no general result for the assembly. In Ephesus we have Christ's position as Judge in the midst of the candlesticks, and the assembly threatened with removal from its place of witness upon earth. In Thyatira He takes His place as Son of God, Son over His own house, and, as things are (as to the assembly) got to the worst, is revealed in all-piercing and immutable judgment, and the whole blessing of the new state is promised to the overcomer. In Pergamos we have faithfulness found in its previous path, Christ's name and faith held fast in spite of persecution. It differs from Philadelphia, that His word is not said to be held fast as that of Christ's patience (that the assembly, in its Pergamos state, did not do), but it did hold fast the confession of Christ in the midst of persecution. But another kind of evil came in—seduction to fall in with the world's ways by evil teaching within. The doctrine of Balaam was there. Idolatry flowed in. There were also sects within, which taught pretended sanctity but evil practice. These the Lord would judge.

The general truth of removing the candlestick had no place here, neither as a general truth, when the assembly could be called on to keep its first love, nor as

fiery judgment, because it was gone wholly astray; but there were corrupters, and Christ's servants were led into idolatry and evil. Individual approbation by Christ, communion with Himself in future blessing (in spirit then), as the once humbled and rejected One (which the assembly was ceasing to be), a name given by Christ, and so of tenderness on His part, a link known only to him who had it. In a word, individual association and individual blessing of secret delight—this was the promise to the overcomer when corruption was advancing, not yet dominant and unhindered in the assembly.

In Thyatira the assembly reaches to the close. There was found, in what Christ owned in this state of things, increasing devotedness. But Jezebel was allowed; and both connection with the world, idolatry, and children begotten to it in the assembly itself. All would be judged, great tribulation fall on Jezebel, and her children be killed. Christ searched the heart and reins, and applied judgment in unchangeable righteousness. The faithful ones of this epoch, the "you" that Christ specially addresses, are but a "rest," a remnant, but specially and growingly devoted. It is, we may remark here, what the assemblies are towards Christ, which is especially in view. What Jezebel did towards the faithful ones is not noted. The Lord's coming is the time looked to; and the whole millennial blessing is promised to him that overcomes; both to reign with Christ, and Christ the Morning Star Himself. "He that hath an ear "is now put after the overcoming; not said in connection with the assembly, but with those who overcome in it. The state is the state characterised by this. Thyatira may go on to the end, but does not characterise the witness of God to

the end; other states must be brought in to do that. It is, I have no doubt, the Popery of the middle ages, say to the Reformation; Romanism itself goes on to the end. The judgment on Jezebel is final. The Lord had given her space to repent, and she had not repented. It would be a forced association with those whom she had once seduced to the ruin of them all. The whole character here is piercing judgment according to God's own nature and requirements; special trial and judgment, yet the blessing not special, but the portion of the saints at large in that which they have with Christ; as the departure and judgment were complete—adultery, not merely failure in first love.

We have seen the close at the Lord's coming contemplated in Thyatira. Sardis begins a new collateral phase of the assembly's history. Save the having the seven stars, none of the ecclesiastical characters of Christ, none of those noticed in Him as walking in the midst of the assemblies, are noticed. Still the assembly is noticed as such. It is still the history of the assembly. But, the Lord's coming having been noticed, all characteristics of Christ refer to what He will have in the kingdom. Still He has yet the seven stars—supreme authority over the assembly. It is nothing peculiar to this assembly He has it over, and as to, all. It is in this character He has to do with Sardis. He has the seven spirits, the fulness of the perfection in which He will govern the earth. Thus He is competent to bless in the assembly, though there is no regular ecclesiastical connection. He has power over all, and the fulness of the Spirit; both in perfection. Whatever the assembly is, He is all this. This is a great comfort. The assembly cannot

fail in the place of witness through want of fulness of grace in Him. Nor can He fail him who has ears to hear.

But the state of the assembly shewed that it was far from availing itself of it. It had indeed a name to live; it was superior in its pretensions to the evil of Thyatira; nor were there Jezebels and corruption. But there was practically death. There was no completeness in her works before God. It was not evil here, but lack of spiritual energy. But this did leave individuals to defile their garments in the world. She was called to remember, not her first works, but what she had received and heard, the truth committed to her, the gospel and word of God; if not, she would be treated as the world. The Lord would come as a thief; for the Lord's coming is now always in view.

There is no threat of removing the candlestick: that was settled. Judgment, setting aside the assembly, was fixed. But this body would be treated as the world, not ecclesiastically as a corrupt assembly (compare 1 Thess. 5). However, some had preserved their integrity, and would be owned; and they would walk with Christ as those that had done righteousness. This was the promise too. They had confessed His name practically before men, before the world, and theirs would be confessed before God when the nominal assembly was treated as the world. They were real Christians in the midst of a worldly profession, and their names would not be struck out of the register, then ill-kept on earth, but infallibly rectified by heavenly judgment. It has been remarked that, simultaneously with bringing in the Lord's coming, the ear to hear comes after the distinguishing of the overcomers. Such a remnant only is looked for. I cannot doubt that we have Protestantism here.

The assembly of Philadelphia has a peculiarly interesting character. Nothing is said of its works, but that Christ knows them. But what is interesting in it is that it is peculiarly associated with Christ Himself. Christ, as in all these last assemblies, is not seen in the characters in which He walked in the midst of the assemblies, but in such as faith peculiarly recognises when ecclesiastical organisation has become the hot-bed of corruption. Here it is His personal character, what He is intrinsically, holy and true, what the word displays and requires, and what the word of God is in itself—moral character and faithfulness. Indeed this last word includes all: faithfulness to God within and without, according to what is revealed, and faithful to make good all He has declared.

Christ is known as the Holy One. Then outward ecclesiastical associations or pretensions will not do. There must be what suits His nature, and faithful consistency with that word which He will certainly make good. With this He has the administration; and opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens. See what His path was on earth: only then graciously dependent, as we are. He was holy and true, to man's view had a little strength, kept the word, lived by every word that proceeded out of God's lips, waited patiently for the Lord, and to Him the porter opened. He lived in the last days of a dispensation, the holy and true One, rejected, and, to human eye, failing in success with those who said they were Jews, but were the synagogue of Satan. So the saints here: they walk in a place like His; they keep His word, have a little strength, are not marked by a Pauline energy of the Spirit, but do not deny His name. This is the character and motive of all

their conduct. It is openly confessed, the word kept, the name not denied. It seems little; but in universal decline, much pretension and ecclesiastical claim, and many falling away to man's reasonings, keeping the word of Him that is holy and true, and not denying His name is everything.

And this element is noticed. Christ, the holy and true One, is waiting. Here on earth He waited patiently for Jehovah. It is the character of perfect faith. Faith has a double character —energy which overcomes, and patience which waits for God and trusts Him (see the first in Heb. 11:23-34; the latter in v. 8-22). It is the latter which is found here; the word of patience kept.

But as regards the former substantive qualities, keeping the word, and not denying Christ's name (though with a little strength) in presence of ecclesiastical pretension to a successional God-established religion, promises were given. Christ would force these pretentious claimants to divine succession to come and own that He had loved those who kept His word. An open door was given at present, and no man could shut it; just as the porter had opened to Him, so that scribes and Pharisees and priests could not hinder it. In the future they would have to own themselves humbled, and that those who followed the word of the holy and true One were those He had loved. Meanwhile His approbation was sufficient. This was the test of faith—to be satisfied with His approbation, content with the authority of His word.

But there was a promise also as to the Lord's judgments in the earth. Christ is waiting till His enemies be made His footstool. We must wait for it to see the world set right. We have to go on where the god of this world has

his way, though under divine limitation. The thought that good is to have its rights in this world is to forget the cross and Christ. We cannot have our rights till He has, for we have none but His. Judgment (since Pilate had it, and Christ was the righteous One before him) has not yet returned to righteousness. Till then Christ waits, though at the right hand of God; and we wait. It is not persecution and martyrdom, as in Smyrna. It is as hard a task perhaps, or, at any rate, our task now— patience and contentedness with Christ's approbation, keeping His word, not denying His name.

But then there were other and blessed encouragements. There was an hour of temptation coming upon all the world to try those who belonged to earth, who dwelt there as belonging to it. Some might be spared, victorious in the trial; but those who kept the word of Christ's patience would be kept from it. On the whole world it would come; and where were they?—Out of the world. They had not belonged to it when in it. They had been waiting for Christ to take His power—waiting His time to have the world. They belonged to heaven, to Him who was there; and they would be taken to be with Him when the world was to be in the time of terrible trial. There was a special time before He took His power; and not only would they reign with Him in result, but they would be kept from that hour, and had the assurance of it in the time of their trial. And hence the Lord points them to His coming as their hope; not as warning that the unrepentant would be treated as the world when He appeared. He came quickly, and they were to look for the crown then, holding fast what they had, feeble but spiritually associated with Him as they were, lest any should take it.

We have now the general promise in heavenly places marked by special association with Christ; and they are publicly owned in that in which they seemed on earth to have nothing. Others had the pretension to be the people of God, the city of God—to have divine religious title; these were only consistent with His word, and they waited for Christ. Now, when Christ takes His power, when things are real, according to Him in power, they have this place according to God. It was the cross and contempt below; it is the display of God's name and heavenly city above.

Let us examine the promise to the overcomers here. He who had but a little strength is a pillar in the temple of the God in whom and with whom he is blessed. He was held perhaps as outside the ecclesiastical unity and order; he is a pillar in it in heaven, and will go no more out. On him who was hardly owned to have a part in grace has the name of his rejected Saviour's God been stamped publicly in glory. He who was hardly accounted to belong to the holy city has its heavenly name written on him too, and Christ's new name—the name not known to prophets and Jews according to the flesh, but which He has taken as dead to this world (where the false assembly settles down) and risen into heavenly glory. The careful association with Christ is striking here, and gives its character to the promise. "The temple of my God," says Christ; "the name of my God"; "of the city of my God," "my new name." Associated in Christ's own patience, Christ confers upon him what fully associates him in His own blessing with God. This is of peculiar blessing, and full of encouragement for us.

Laodicea follows. Lukewarmness characterises the last state of profession in the assembly. It is nauseous to

Christ; He will spue it out of His mouth. It was not mere want of power, it was want of heart—the worst of all ills. This threat is peremptory, not conditional. It brought irremediable rejection. With this want of heart for Christ and His service, there was much pretension to the possession of resources and competency in themselves; "I am rich," whereas they had nothing of Christ. It is the professing assembly accounting itself rich without having Christ as the riches of the soul by faith. Therefore He counsels them to buy of Him true and approved righteousness, clothing for their moral nakedness, and what gave spiritual sight; for they were, as respects what Christ is and gives before God, poor, naked, and miserable, and specially so. This is Christ's judgment of their pretended acquisitions according to man. However, as long as the assembly subsists, Christ continues to deal in grace, stands at the door and knocks, presses reception of Himself in the closest way on the conscience. If any one, still in what He was going to spue out, heard His voice and opened, He would give him admission to be with Him, and a part in the kingdom.

There is no coming here; nor was there for the judgment of Jezebel. That was practically Babylon; and she is judged before Christ comes. This is spued out of Christ's mouth, cast off as worthless to Him; but the general body is judged as the world. The Lord's coming is in Thyatira for the saints, and in Philadelphia too. That is its aspect as to the assembly, and that only. Sardis is reduced, if unrepentant, to the condition of the world, and judged as such. When the state of Laodicea arrives, the assembly is disowned and rejected of Christ in that character: but for that His coming is not to be spoken of.

Although Thyatira goes down to the end and closes ecclesiastically the assembly's history, yet only in the first three is the assembly at large treated as the subject of repentance. In Thyatira space had been given Jezebel to repent, and she did not: and the scene is to close and be replaced by the kingdom. In this respect the last four assemblies go together. There is no prospect of repentance of the whole assembly, or restoration. Sardis is called to hold fast and repent, and remember what she had received; but, if she does not watch, is to be treated as the world. Hence, as we have seen, the call to hear is addressed to overcomers after the promise.

The character of Christ in connection with this assembly must not be passed over. It brings out the passage from the various conditions of the assembly to His authority above and beyond it over the world. Christ personally takes up what the assembly has ceased to be. He is the Amen, the fulfilment and verifier of all the promises, the real witness and revealer of God and of truth, when the assembly is not; and the beginning of the creation of God—Head over all things, and the glory and witness of what it is as from God—as the new creation. The assembly ought to have displayed the power of the new creation by the Holy Ghost; as if any man is in Christ, it is a new creation, where all things are of God. We, as its firstfruits, are created again in Him. The assembly has thus the things which remain (2 Cor. 3:11). But she has been an unfaithful witness of it. Does she possess a part in it? It is because Christ does, and He is the true beginning of it as really displayed. The responsible witness of it by the Holy Ghost having failed, Christ now takes it up, coming in for its effectual display.

But the series of preparatory events in the world must first be gone into. And it is to be remarked, that there is no mention here of the fact of the Lord's coming in reference to the assembly. It is promised that He will come quickly; and the assembly is threatened with being spued out of His mouth. But the fact of His coming for His own, or the assembly's rapture at any time, is not stated. This falls in fully with what we have seen of John's ministry159—his being occupied with the manifestation of the Lord on earth, and scarce touching (and only when needed on leaving the disciples) on heavenly promises. In John 14 and 17 he does it exceptionally. Here it is left out. Even in Revelation 12, which remarkably confirms what I say, the rapture is only seen as identified with the catching up of the man-child, Christ Himself. Hence we have no specific relative epoch noted for the taking away the saints here, save that they are taken before the war in heaven which leads to the last three years and a half. But on the other hand the saints belonging to the assembly, or before, are always seen above when the epistles to the assemblies are ended. They are waiting for judgment to be given to them for the avenging of their blood; but they are never seen on earth.

But we have to consider where the fourth chapter commences God's ways. It does not follow necessarily that the assembly has been spued out of Christ's mouth. It had been threatened; but the judgment on Sardis, or even on Thyatira, was not yet come. But it is after Christ has ceased to deal with the professing assembly as such, looking to it as His light-bearer before the world. What it may call itself still is not stated; He is not dealing with it. An open apostasy will come. Its date is not revealed;

nor is it revealed as to the rapture. But I gather from 2 Thessalonians 2, that the rapture will be before the apostasy. What we have stated then is, that it is after all dealing with the assemblies by Christ is closed, that the subsequent dealings with the world in the Revelation begin. The assemblies are “the things that are”; what follows, “the things after these.” Christ is not now seen walking in their midst; He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne. John is not occupied with seeing Him there, or sending messages to the assemblies, but is called up to heaven where all the ways of God are now carried on, and that towards the world, not the assembly. We have the throne too, not the long-robed priest. The kings and priests we read of in chapter 1 are now on high. Others may follow them; but they are in heavenly places, seated on thrones, or worshipping, or presenting their censers full of incense. On the other hand the Lord is not come to judge the world, but about to receive the inheritance. The saints then, who will be caught up to meet Christ, are seen only on high here; they belong to heaven, and are no longer dealt with on earth, but have their own place in heaven.

The connection between the two parts of the Apocalypse is this:—Christ, who was judging in the midst of the professing church, is now seen on high, opening the book of this world’s judgment, of which He is about to take the inheritance publicly. From this scene of judgment the saints are far. The apostle’s occupation with the assembly now ceases—an important point, for the Holy Spirit must be occupied with it as long as the saints are in it on earth;—and he is taken up to heaven, and there he sees God in covenant with creation, on a throne of government, with a rainbow round about it.

The living creatures celebrate Him as the Creator, the One for whom all things were created. The throne was not a throne of grace, but the signs of power and judgment broke forth from it; but around it those who represent the saints received at Christ's coming, the kings and priests, are sitting on thrones in a circle round the throne. No altar of sacrifice is in view, as if it were a time of approach; the brazen laver has glass instead of water. It is a fixed accomplished holiness, not cleansing of feet. The elders are crowned, the number twenty-four recalling the courses of the priests. The seven Spirits of God are there in the temple, not Christ's to wield for the assembly, or sent out into the world, but the perfections in attributes which characterise the actions of God in the world. This it is bears light now into the world.

Besides these, four living creatures are there in the circle of the throne itself and around the throne. They may be viewed as forming the throne, or apart from it, though connected with it as a centre. They have some of the characters of the cherubim, some of the seraphim, but somewhat different from both. They were full of eyes, before and behind, to see all things according to God, and within; having also six wings; perfect in inward perception, but given perception, and in the celerity of their motions. They embraced also the four species of creation in the ordered earth: man, cattle, beast of the field, fowl of the air: these symbolising the powers or attributes of God, themselves worshipped by the heathen, here only the instruments of the throne. Him who sat on it the heathen knew not. The intelligence, firmness, power, rapidity of execution which belong to God were typified as elsewhere by them. They are symbols. Divers agents may be the instruments of their

activity. But though there was the general analogy of the cherubim, judicial and governmental power, these had a peculiar character.

The cherubim in the temple had two wings, which formed the throne; they looked on the covenant, and at the same time, as of pure gold, were characterised by the divine righteousness of the throne to be approached. In Ezekiel they were the support of the firmament above which the God of Israel was: it was a throne of executive judgment. They were like burnished brass, and like fire —a symbol we have considered already. They had four wings: two to fly with, two to cover themselves. From Ezekiel 10 it appears they were full of eyes ("it is not said within") it was to govern what was outside according to God, not divine intelligence within. In Isaiah 6 the seraphim (or burners) have six wings as here; they are above the throne, and cry as here, Holy, holy, holy! They, with a burning coal, cleansed the prophet's Ups; they were above the throne.

The symbols used here become clearer through these cases. The living creatures are in and around the throne; for it is a throne of executory judgment, with the attributes of cherubim united to it. But it is not, as in Israel, mere earthly providential judgment, a whirlwind out of the north. There is before us the government of all the earth, and executory judgment according to the holiness of God's nature.160 There is not only full perception of all, but intrinsic perception morally. It is no seat of gold to be approached, as in the tabernacle. The intrinsic holiness of God is applied to judgment. He is making good His nature and character in all creation. Providence would be no longer a riddle. It was not complex attributes unsolved, so to speak, though applied

in special circumstances; each act would have its character.

Here too remark, it is not, as in the first chapter, the God who is, though embracing past and future, God in Himself; but the God of ages, “who was, and is, and is to come.” Still He has all Old Testament names: Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai. His attributes now celebrate His full name, as the Holy One who lives for ever and ever—has no passing power or being, like man at his best estate, vanity. And the saints here fall down before the throne, bow themselves before His place in glory, and worship Him in His endless being, and lay down their given glory before His supreme and proper glory, ascribing all glory to Him alone, as alone worthy of it; but here, according to the nature of the celebration of it, the Creator for whom all things are. In all changes these remained true.

It will be remarked here, that the living creatures only celebrate and declare; the elders worship with understanding. All through the Revelation the elders give their reason for worshipping. There is spiritual intelligence in them.

Further, remark, that when thunderings and lightnings and voices, the signs of terror in judgment, go forth from the throne, the throned elders remain unmoved; they are on thrones around when the throne of judgment is introduced. This is their place before God in respect of judgment. Whenever He takes judgment in hand this is their position. They are part of the glory—assessors of the throne from which its terror goes forth. When He that sits on it is celebrated, they are all activity, own all glory to be His, are prostrate on their faces, and cast

their crowns before Him, more blessed in owning His glory, than in possessing their own.

We do not find the Father here; it is Jehovah. And indeed should we ask in whom He is personally displayed, it would be, as always, in the Son; but it is in itself simply the Jehovah of the Old Testament here.

In the next chapter we find the Lamb. A book was in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. It was counsels, wielded by His power. Who could open them and bring them forth to execution? Who had the title to do so? None in heaven or earth but One. The elders explained to the prophet who mourned that the ways of God should be shut up, that the mighty One of Judah, the true source of all promises to David, had prevailed to open it and loose the seals. This was the Lamb, the rejected Messiah. He was more than this, as the chapter goes on to shew; but He is this. The rejected Messiah was in the midst of the divine throne; and within all the displays of providence and grace—the living creatures and elders—stood a Lamb as it had been slain. He had the fulness of power over the earth—seven horns—as of God, and the seven Spirits of God for government, according to God's perfection, of all the earth. When He has taken the book, the living creatures and elders fall down before Him with golden censers full of the prayers of the saints. They are priests here.

Now a new song is sung to celebrate the Lamb. What seemed His dishonour and rejection on earth was the ground of His worthiness to take the book. He who at all suffering and cost to Himself had glorified all that God was, was able and worthy to unfold what made it good in the way of government. It was not the government of

Israel, but of all the earth; not merely earthly chastisements according to God's revelation of Himself in Israel, but the display in power of all God was in the whole earth. He who had glorified all He was, and redeemed, by the gospel of what He was through His death, out of all the earth, was the fit One to bring it forth in power. He does not yet come forth; but His work is the worthy instrument, the divine motive, for the display of it all. He can unlock the seals of God's ways and mysteries. I read the passage thus:—"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God, by thy blood, out of every kindred, etc., and hast made them unto our God kings and priests, and they shall reign over the earth." Thus it is not any particular class, but the value of the act which is the motive of praise, and all being confided to Him.

Here the angels come in to praise, not in the fourth chapter. I can hardly doubt that a change in administrative order takes place here. Until the Lamb took the book, they were the administrative power; they were the instruments through which what the four living creatures symbolised was exercised in the earth. "But unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." Hence, as soon as the Lamb appears and takes the book, as soon as the idea of redemption is brought in, the living creatures and elders are brought together, and the angels take their own place apart. Like the living creatures before, they give no reason for their praise. As the heads of creation as to their nature, they celebrate with all creatures the title to glory of the Lamb and His own worthiness, ascribing praise to Him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb for ever and ever. The four living creatures, that is, all the

exercise of God's power in creation and providence, join their Amen, and the elders worship God in the excellency of His being. But the living creatures and elders are joined (verse 8) in falling down before the Lamb. I do not think they are meant to be distinguished in the latter part of the verse,161 but merge in the elders, symbolising different service but not now two classes. Verse 9 is the general fact; not "they sung," but "they sing." This takes place in heaven; but those named are in the mind in a general way. Thus the source of what follows, the throne, and the persons engaged in heaven before God in all that passes, are displayed: whence the judgment flows, who surround the throne of God above, and who is in it, have been brought before us; the heavenly scene, and choir, and assistants.

What is to follow on earth now begins, when the seals are opened. It will be remarked here, that John, standing in the ruin of the assembly, gives prophetically all that passes from that failure till Christ comes in chapter 19. There is no ascension, no rapture, save so far as chapter 12:5 gives both together.

The first seals are simple; nor have I anything to offer very new upon them: first, imperial conquests, then wars, then famine, then pestilence, carrying with it what Ezekiel calls God's four sore plagues (sword, famine, pestilence, and the beasts of the earth). They speak of the providential course of God's dealings, and hence the four beasts call attention to it; but they have God's voice in them, the voice of the Almighty: that, the ear of him who has the Spirit hears. These complete providential plagues, as spoken of in scripture. Then direct judgments follow; but these are what we may call preparatory measures.

I have to notice that in the full plagues of verse 8 the whole Roman earth is not included. It is a fourth, not a third. The plagues too, note, are limited in extent of sphere, not universal.

The saints are those whom God is really thinking of, and they come in remembrance before other scenes are brought out. Those who had been martyred for the word of God and their testimony demand how long before they were avenged; for we have ever to do here with a God of judgment. Their being under the altar means simply that they had offered their bodies, as sacrifices for the truth, to God. The white robes are the witness of their righteousness—God's declared approval of them; but the time for their being avenged was not yet. I do not think giving white robes is resurrection. The first resurrection is sovereign grace, giving us the same place with Christ ("for ever with the Lord"), consequent on His work and His being our righteousness, which is alike to all of us. White robes thus conferred are the recognition of the righteousness (righteousnesses)162 of the saints—hence are seen in chapter 19:8 at His appearing. "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." I am not denying that we are made clean, and our robes white in the blood of the Lamb. But, even where this is said in chapter 7, I think it refers especially to the way they have been associated by faith with the suffering position of Christ. Here white robes are given them—their service owned; but, for avenging, they must wait till a new scene of persecution had brought them companions who had to be honoured and avenged like them. Still this marks progress, and finds its cause in the dealings of God to bring about this new state of things, which

issues in final judgment and setting aside of evil. Here the judgments are providential.

The next thing to the claim for avenging is the breaking up of the whole system of earthly government, and the terror of all on earth. How clearly we see here that we are in a scene of judgment, and that God is a God of judgment! The desires of the saints are like the desires of the Psalms. We are not with children before the Father, with grace, with the gospel, and the assembly; but with Jehovah, where God is a God of judgment, and by Him actions are weighed. We are on Old Testament ground, that is, prophecy, not grace to the wicked, though judgment brings in blessing.

The opening of the sixth seal brings an earthquake, that is, a violent convulsion of the whole structure of society. All the governing powers are therein visited; and, seeing all subverted, small and great think (with bad consciences as they have) that the day of the Lamb's wrath is come. But it is not, though preparatory judgments with a view to His kingdom are there.

But God thinks too of His saints on earth (where, we must remember, the assembly is never now seen) before the scenes which follow, whether judgments on the Roman earth or the special workings of evil, to secure and seal them for that day.

First, the perfect number of the remnant of Israel is sealed, before the providential instruments of God's judgments are allowed to act; 144,000=12 x 12 x 1000. They are secured for blessing according to God's purposes and set apart by Him; not yet seen in their blessings, but secured for them. Afterwards the vast multitude from among the Gentiles is seen. We must

remark here, there is no previous prophetic announcement of the blessing of the spared ones in the great tribulation (not the three years and a half of Matthew 24—this refers to Jews—but that mentioned in the epistle to the church at Philadelphia). Hence this is fully given to us here, and we are distinctly told who they are. A multitude of Gentiles is seen standing not as around the throne, but before it and before the Lamb, their righteousness owned and themselves victorious. They ascribe salvation to God thus revealed, that is, to God on the throne, and to the Lamb. They belong to these earthly scenes, not to the assembly. This is answered by the angels who are around the throne, the elders, and the living creatures—all together composing the heavenly part of the scene already connected with the throne; the angels surrounding the others, which form the centre and immediate circle of the throne, the white-robed multitude before it. The angels give their Amen, and pronounce the praise of their God too.

All this belonged to the white-robed multitude and the angels; only the former speak of the Lamb, who was also their salvation. The angels add their Amen to this; but praise their God. They had ascribed glory and blessing to the Lamb before; but, naturally, salvation to the Lamb was not their own part of the song. But the four living creatures and the elders do not worship here, because their own relationships were different, and these are not what are spoken of here. They are found, as far as the book goes, in chapters 4 and 5, where they are on thrones around, and cast their crowns before the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever. They give the motives of worship according to the relationships they are in: that of the angels is with their God; of the

white-robed multitude, with the God of the throne and the Lamb as having the title to the government and deliverance of the earth as a present thing. That the Lamb was the Son, yea, the God who created the angels, is not the question here, but of each speaking in his own relationship, so as to bring these relationships out.

We have thus the heavenly hosts, the glorified saints, and the white-robed multitude, each in a different relationship, but the first and the last thrown in the main together—the glorified saints forming a class apart. They do not worship here. But one of the elders, who have always the intelligence of God, explains to the prophet who the white-robed multitude are. It formed no part of the prophetic revelation as yet, and it was not the assembly's own place. "Sir, thou knowest," says the prophet. They had come out of the great tribulation, faithful in it, their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. They were not millennial saints, that is, born in that time, and subject by birth to the responsibility of that condition (which grace had to meet). They were cleansed and owned to be so, having the consciousness of it and victory when the others began; so that they, as already cleansed and owned, are always before the throne a special class, and serve Him day and night in His temple.

This at once distinguishes them from the heavenly worshippers; there is no temple there; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. He that sits on the throne tabernacles over these, as once over the tabernacle. They are not only as Israel in the courts, or the nations in the world: they have a priest's place in the world's temple. The millennial multitudes are worshippers; these priests. As Anna, the daughter of

Phanuel, ever in the temple itself, they have always access to the throne. But they had blessings under the Lamb also, to whom they alike ascribe their salvation—the good Shepherd cast out, and who had passed through tribulation Himself, also so great, would feed them; they would not hunger any more or thirst any more, as they had often done; nor should persecution or tribulation reach them. The Lamb, as known in this transitional time, but exalted in the throne, would feed them and lead them to living fountains of water. It is not, as to us, the promise of a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, and flowing out as a river; but they would be fed, refreshed, and perfectly cared for by the Lamb's grace whom they had followed; and God Himself would wipe all tears from their eyes. They would have the consolations of God, worth all the sorrows they had passed through. But their blessings are consolations, not proper heavenly joy. They are thus a class apart, distinct from the elders or heavenly saints, and distinct from millennial saints who will never see tribulation, having a known position fixed in grace before God. It is a new revelation as to those passing through the great tribulation. The 144,000 of chapter 14 are a similar class from among the Jews, coming out of their special tribulation.

Again, divine interest in the saints, brought out into action by the effectual intercession of the great High Priest, brings down judgments on the world. For those under the altar there was no intercession; they were perfected, having been rejected and slain like Christ. There are saints upon the earth who yet need this intercession, so that their cry in their infirmity should be heard and answered. The smoke of the incense came up

with the prayers of the saints. The great Mediator took of the fire off the altar, put it into the censer, and cast it on the earth. The intercession turned into judgments in the answer, and the signs of God's power were manifested, and subversion of order on earth followed—voices, thunderings, lightnings (as when the throne was set), and an earthquake.

Then follow specific judgments, on the signal being given from above. They fell on the Roman earth, the third part of the earth (see chap. 12:4). First, judgment from heaven, hail and fire; and violence or destruction of men; on earth blood: the effect was the destruction of the great ones in the Roman earth, and of all general prosperity. Next, a great power, as the judgment of God, was cast into the mass of peoples—still, I apprehend, in the Roman earth; for destruction of men, and all that belonged to their subsistence and commerce followed in those limits. Next, one that should have been a special source of light and order in government fell from his place, and corrupted the moral sources of popular motives and feelings—what governs and sways the people so as to characterise them. They became bitter, and men died of it. The last of these four plagues falls on the governing powers, and puts them out in their order, as from God: all in the limits of the Roman earth. This closed the general judgments, subverting and producing disaster and confusion in the Roman earth, where the power of evil, as against the saints, was.

Woe (specially on those who had their settled place on earth, in contrast with the heavenly calling, and who were unawakened and unmoved by the judgments on the earth, but clung to it in spite of all as their home), is then announced. Threefold woe! The term "dwellers on,"

or “inhabiters of,” the earth, has not yet been used, save in the promise to Philadelphia, and the claims of the souls under the altar: for both of these were in contrast with such. After all these dealings of God they are a distinct and manifested class, and spoken of, in what passes on the earth, as such. Against this perversely unbelieving class the earthly judgments of God are now directed: the first, against the Jews; the second, against the inhabitants of the Roman earth; the last, universal.

The fifth angel sounds (chap. 9); and one who should have been by position the instrument of light and governmental order over the earth was seen as having lost his place; and the power to let loose the full darkening influence of Satan was given him. He opened the bottomless pit—the place where evil is shut up and chained; not where it is punished, that is, the lake of fire. Supreme authority, and all heavenly light over the earth, and healthful influence of order, were darkened and made to cease by the evil satanic influence which was let loose. Nor was this all: direct instruments of satanic power came out of this evil influence in numbers; crowds of moral locusts with the sting of false doctrine in their tail. But it was not to destroy temporal prosperity on the earth, but to torment the ungodly Jews; not to kill, but to harass and vex them. This was to continue five months; for it is not the final judgment. The torment was worse than death—pain and anguish of heart. But they had the semblance of military imperial power, crowned, and with masculine energy, to those that met them; but they were, if seen behind and the secret disclosed, subject and weak: their faces were as the faces of men, their hair as the hair of women. But they were armed in a steeled conscience. They were the

direct instruments of the power of Satan, and under his orders. The angel of the bottomless pit—he who rules the depths of Satan's wiles, as the ruler of the power of darkness— led them. We are too unbelieving as to the direct influence of Satan in darkening men's minds when permitted, when men are given up to his darkening influence. Cruel harassing torments, worse than death, with darkening of their minds, become the portion of the once beloved people. One woe was past.

The sixth angel sounds. The woe which follows is much more human and providential. It is directed against the inhabitants of the Latin Empire. The instruments of it are let loose from beyond Euphrates—a countless crowd of horsemen. But they were not simply such. Their consciences and their words, both were in the power of Satan, but in judgment from God. But it now killed men. Their mouths belched forth the power of Satan, and their influence in doctrine was satanic: with both they did hurt. I do not believe this death here is mere temporal death (there may be such), but, I suspect, making apostates. The rest, who did not thus fall, did not repent of their idolatry and misdeeds.

These were preliminary woes on the body of Jews and christianised Gentiles, not the direct antagonism of the power of evil with God. This is now unfolded, but first, in the little open book, put in its place in the general history (chap. 10). The book is open as part of well-known prophecy, and now brought to a direct issue on known ground; not the unrevealed and more unmanifest ways of God introducing the final issue. Christ comes down and affirms His right to all below; puts His right foot on the sea, the left on the earth, and utters the voice of His might, to which the voice of the Almighty in

power answers. But its revelations were sealed up; but Christ swears by Him who lives for ever and ever that there should be no more delay. All things are drawing to a final issue. In the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God would be closed—His direct power come. The prophet is to recommence his prophecy as to nations and tongues, and languages.

We are here at once in the centre of prophetic subjects—Jerusalem, the temple, the altar, and worshippers (chap. n). The worshippers and the altar are recognised and accepted of God—those worshipping in the secret of God within. The general profession of Judaism is rejected and disowned. It is given up to be trodden down under the Gentiles, and that for the half-week of sorrow. Those who held the place of priests were owned. Real worshippers, according to God's mind, were there and owned; and God gave also an adequate testimony—two witnesses—what was required under the law; and they continue day by day constantly to give witness the whole period, or half-week. The witnesses were in sorrow and reproach, but with power; as Elias and Moses were when the people were in apostasy and captivity. It was not the re-establishment of Israel with royalty and priesthood, as it would be afterwards—the candlestick of Zechariah with the two olive-trees—but the sufficient witness to it. Nor could they be touched while the half-week of their prophecy lasted; their word brought death on their adversaries. We have priesthood and prophecy in the remnant, not of course royalty, but a testimony to it practically: suffering marked its absence, yet none could touch them till their time were come. In this they were like Christ in His humiliation in the midst of Israel; only He did not slay His enemies. In the Psalms He

marks it out as the remnant's portion. Complete humiliation and the full answer of God to their prophetic word marked their state. But when they had finished their testimony, the case is different. They had to do with the beast out of the bottomless pit. They stood before the God of the earth—not preachers of heavenly gospel, but witnesses of God's title to the earth—of His love to His people in connection with it. They bore witness to God's claim when hostile Gentiles were in possession. The beast, now their hour is come, slays them, and their bodies are cast into the highways of the city. Those of the nations rejoice over them and make merry. The dwellers upon earth, who would have the earth theirs and ease upon it, were delighted: for the witnesses of the God of the earth tormented them; but in three days and a half, quickened by the power of the Spirit of God, they ascended to heaven in a cloud, not as Christ did, apart, but in the sight of their enemies. A tenth of the great city of the world fell at the same time in the convulsion that took place on the earth; and the remnant are affrighted, and give glory to the God of heaven. But God was dealing already as the God of the earth. The second woe was now past.

Thus we get the close of the half-week indicated; the seventh trumpet was quickly to sound, which was to finish the mystery of God. It sounds; and there were great voices in heaven declaring that the worldly kingdom of their Lord (Jehovah) and of His anointed (Christ) was come—the greatest woe and terror of all to the inhabitants of the earth. Satan's woe had been specially on Jews; man's woe, specially on the men of the Latin Empire; this is God's woe when the nations are angry, and God's wrath is come, and full reckoning and

final deliverance come. We have again the elders here announcing the reason of praise and thanksgiving. Voices in heaven announce the fact of the reign of Jehovah and of His Christ according to Psalm 2, and that He (for, as ever, John unites both in one thought) should reign for ever and ever; and so it will be. But both the earthly and eternal kingdom are celebrated. Only in the eternal kingdom the distinction of the worldly kingdom and of Christ's subordination is omitted. In the thanksgiving of the elders, Jehovah Elohim Shaddai is also celebrated; as the great King who takes to Him His power and reigns; for it is God's kingdom. We have two parts in their statement: the nations angry—this brings in the time of God's wrath; and the time of the dead to be judged. This is the first half: man's wrath, and God's judgment. Then He gives reward to prophets, saints, and all that fear His name, and sets aside from the earth those who corrupted it. This is blessing. The first part is general, the time of wrath and judgment; the second is reward and deliverance of the saints on earth. This closes entirely the main symbolic history. The last trumpet has sounded, and the mystery of God is closed.

In what follows we have details: the beast, and the connection of the assembly and Jews with it; Babylon; and then the marriage of the Lamb; judgments of beast and false prophet; binding of Satan; two resurrections, and final judgment; and the description of the heavenly city. But this new prophecy begins (chap. 11:19), as to earthly prophetic dealing, with special reference to the Jews. The temple of God is opened in heaven, the ark of His covenant, which refers to Israel is seen there. But judgment characterises it now; judgments of all kinds, those coming down from above, and subversion and

disaster below.163 Chapter 12 gives us a brief but all-important summary of the whole course of events, viewed, not in their instruments on earth or the judgment of these, but the divine view of all the principles at work, the state of things as revealed of God. The first symbolical person, subject of the prophecy and result of all God's ways in it, is a woman clothed with the sun, having a crown of twelve stars, and the moon under her feet. It is Israel, or Jerusalem as its centre, as in the purpose of God (compare Isa. 9:6, and Psa. 87:6). She is clothed with supreme authority, invested with the glory of perfect administration in man, and all the original reflected glory of this under the old covenant, under her feet. She was travailing in childbirth, distressed, and in pain to be delivered: on the other hand Satan's power in the form of the Roman Empire, complete in forms of power, seven heads, but incomplete in administrative supremacy—ten, not twelve horns. But Satan, as the open infidel enemy of God and God's power in Christ, sought to devour the child as soon as born, who was to have the rule of the earth from God. But the child, Christ, and the assembly with Christ, is caught away to God and His throne—does not receive the power yet, but is placed in the very source of it from which it flows. It is not the rapture as regards joy; for it goes back to Christ Himself but the placing Him and the assembly in and with Him, in the seat from which power flows for the establishment of the kingdom. There is no time for this: Christ and the assembly are all one. But the woman— the Jews, after this fly into the wilderness, where God has prepared a place for them, for the half-week.

The assembly, or heavenly saints (as Christ, note), go up to heaven to be out of the way. The Jews, or earthly ones, are protected by providential care upon earth. This gives the whole state of things, and those in view in this scene, and their respective places. She that is to have glory and hold power in the earth is cast out. The child that is to have power, in and from heaven, is previously taken up there. This makes the position very clear.

The historical course of events is now pursued, the child being supposed to be already caught up. There is war in heaven; and the devil and his angels are cast out, and have no more place there. This brings out yet more clearly the distinction of the heavenly saints and the Jewish remnant. The heavenly ones had overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony; the woman's seed have the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, the Spirit of prophecy. What they have of God in the word is according to the Old Testament.

But, to follow up the latter part of the chapter, a loud voice proclaims in heaven that the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ is come—the testimony still of the second Psalm; only as yet it was only proclaimed from heaven, where the power of the kingdom was already made good by the casting down of Satan. Satan's anti-priestly power was over for ever; king and prophet he might yet put on; but his heavenly place was past. The saints of the heavenlies had overcome him by that which made their conscience and their title to heaven good—the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their mouth, God's sword by the Spirit—and gave up their lives to the death. The heavens and the dwellers

there could now rejoice; but it was woe to the inhabiters of earth and sea; for the devil had come down, knowing he had but a little time left. I think verse 11 implies that there are saints killed after the rapture, who yet belong to heaven. If there were such killed because of their faithfulness, were they not taken up, they would lose earth and heaven, though more devoted than those who had earth. We see them moreover in chapter 20 in the first resurrection. The souls under the altar also had to wait for others—their brethren who had to be killed, as they were; and we are to note here that those celebrated as happy are the slain ones, none others. Yet it is before the last three years and a half.

So that we have these three parties in view: the voice of those in heaven; (our) their brethren who had overcome; and those who would be in the three years and a half of Satan's rage, which had not yet begun. Now, if the man-child in heaven be, as we have considered it, Christ and the raptured saints, the voice would be that of those already there,164 and all self-evident: the raptured saints associated with Him celebrate the casting down of the accuser and the deliverance of those who belonged to heaven, calling them "our brethren"—the brethren whose conflict with the accuser was over, as he was now cast down, but who had had to resist him as a heavenly potentate, an anti-priest, all which part is mystery for John— and those who now would be in trial, when he would act with rage on earth, as king and prophet. For the dragon, cast to the earth and unable to accuse in heaven or oppose saints having a heavenly calling (and the priesthood refers to such, not to union), persecutes the Jews, and seeks to destroy their testimony; but God gave, not power of resistance—the Lord must come to

deliver—but power to flee and escape and find refuge where she was nourished the whole half-week out of the serpent's reach. He seeks to pursue; wings he has none: but he uses a river, the movements of people under the influence of special motive and guidance, to overwhelm the woman. But the earth, this organised system in which men live, swallowed the waters up. This influence was in vain—was not met by an army, a counter-power, but was nullified. There was such a disposition or course of the earth as neutralised the effort wholly. So God ordered in His providence; and the dragon turned to persecute individually the faithful remnant of the seed—the Jews who held fast by the word.

In chapter 13 we have the clear and full development of Satan's instruments of evil. They are two—the ten-horned and the two-horned beasts. To the first the dragon, who swept with his tail a third part of the stars to earth, Satan under the form of the Roman Empire, gave his throne and much authority.165 The second not only wielded the first power administratively before him, but was the active power of evil to lead men to recognise the first, and therein the dragon. The beast is the original Roman Empire, but largely modified and in a new character. It has perfect completeness in its forms of government or heads, but is composed often kingdoms, indicating also, I doubt not, imperfect administrative completeness. It has not twelve horns; it is incomplete. Seven would be completeness of a higher kind. The Lamb had seven horns; the woman, twelve stars on her head. One is perfectness in itself; the other administratively in man. Seven is the highest prime number (you cannot make it); twelve, the most perfectly divisible, composed of the same elements, but

multiplied, not added as a simple number. So four is finite perfection, as is a square and still more a cube, perfectly the same all ways but finite. But the beast had names of blasphemy. It was the open enemy of God and His Christ. It absorbed the previous empires and represented them. The dragon, Satan's direct power in the form of the heathen Roman Empire, gave his throne and power to this new beast. It was not of God. God owned no power on the earth now the assembly was gone, till He took His own. The earth was at war with Him.

One of the beast's heads (I doubt not the Imperial) was seen as wounded to death, but healed. The imperial head was restored and the world was in admiration; and they worship the dragon as giving the beast his power. Nothing in their eyes equals the beast; but God is wholly thrown off in the earth. The beast is given to have the greatest pretensions in his language and outrage against God. He blasphemed God, His name and dwelling-place, and the heavenly saints—all Christianity, and the God of it. The dragon had been cast out from heaven; the raptured saints had been received there. He blasphemed, but could only blaspheme them.

As regards those who dwelt on earth (for the division was not merely a spiritual one now), all worshipped the beast, save the elect—those who had been written from the foundation of the world in the Lamb's book of life. Human resistance by force was not the path of obedience. Here the patience and faith of the saints were shewn. He who took the sword would perish by it; it is never Christ's way, but unresisting patience; but the beast who did would perish. This then was the imperial power, a blasphemous power set up by Satan, with the

place of the old Roman Empire, which represented all four, modified in form, but the imperial head restored.

But there was a second beast; it rose not out of the mass of peoples (the sea) to be an empire, but out of the already formed organisation with which God had to say as such. It had the form of Messiah's kingdom on earth, two horns like a lamb; but it was the direct power of Satan. He who with a divinely taught ear heard it speak heard the voice of Satan at once. All the power of the first beast it exercises before it; is, with its power, its minister, and makes the earth and the dwellers on it worship it (that is, the Roman Empire restored to its head). It is Antichrist, the false Christ of Satan, who subjects the earth to the satanic Roman Empire. He does great wonders, so as to give men as good proof of the beast's title before men, as Elijah did of Jehovah's. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2, where the man of sin gives the same proofs, if lying ones, that Jesus did of being the Christ. He deceives the dwellers on earth by his miracles, making them set up an image to him. This image he gives breath to; so that it speaks and causes those to be killed who do not worship it. All likewise were obliged to take the stamp and the mark of the beast's service in their work, or open profession, and no man was allowed to traffic who had not the name of the beast as a mark.

Such is the power which has the character of Messiah's kingdom in its form, is animated with the fullest energy of Satan, and, recognising the public power which Satan had set up in the world, will have every one bow to it, none to traffic without acknowledging it; and all will, save the elect. The anti-priestly power of Satan in the heavens is over; royalty and prophecy as yet remain to

him, in opposition to Christ who has not yet appeared. These he assumes; but he does not and cannot set aside the power of the Gentiles—that remains for Christ to do—but sets it up as his delegate; and, as the apostate Jews of old, so now that people, save the elect remnant, as his instruments bow to it and minister to it. Thus you have all Satan's power exercised. But, in setting up his Messiah, he is obliged to deceive; and advances by his miracles of deceit what he cannot set aside—the Gentile power; and subjects the Jews to idolatry and to the Gentiles; and all the Gentiles themselves dwelling on the earth to the depository of Satan's authority—the first beast.

This is a singular state of things, far from Jewish feelings and modern Gentile hopes; but the unclean spirit of idolatry is to return to his house. Signs, not truth, will govern the superstitious mind of man; they will be given up to believe a lie. Here, though he takes the character of Christ in his kingdom, it is chiefly his action on the Gentiles which is spoken of; the Jews are mixed up with them as we see in Isaiah 66, and Daniel. It is a liberal time, but one of most complete tyranny as regards all who do not bow to Satan's power and the ordinances established by him. What characterises it is the absence of truth.

As regards the number of the beast, I have no doubt that it will be very simple to the godly, when the beast is there, and the time of spiritually judging it comes, and that name will practically guide those who have to do with him. Till then, the speculations of men are not of much value; Irenseus's old one of Latin man is as good as any.

In chapter 14 we have the dealings of God with the evil, only first owning and setting apart the remnant. The remnant belongs entirely to the renewed earth: they are seen on that which is the centre of dominion and glory in it—Mount Zion, where the Lamb shall reign. They had His and His Father's name on their foreheads; that is, by their open confession of God and the Lamb they had been witnesses of it, and suffered as Christ had suffered in His life in owning God His Father: only they had not suffered death. It was a new beginning, not the assembly, not heavenly, but the blessing of a delivered earth in its firstfruits in those who had suffered for the testimony to it. Heaven celebrates it with a voice of many waters, and as of thunder, but with joy. This voice was the voice of harps. A new song is sung before the throne and beasts and elders. Here the fact is the important thing. There had been song in and of heaven, in chapter 5, in connection with redemption; but those who were redeemed there were made kings and priests. Here it was redemption in connection with earthly blessings, not with the kingdom and priesthood on high; and it is sung before the heavenly company and throne. Heaven however is directly connected with the song. It was connected with triumph over the power of evil by patient endurance of suffering.

What specially characterised them was purity from the contamination that surrounded them. This passing through sorrow and overcoming connects them directly with the heavenly conquerors. It was not the new song of heavenly redemption; still it was victory when down at the gates of death, though not actually in it. It was "as it were a new song." This none could learn but those who had shared the earthly sufferings of the Lamb, and

would now be His companions in His earthly royalty; they had followed Him, they would follow Him whithersoever He went. They are the firstfruits of the new scene. They had not corrupted themselves where all did. They were not of those who loved or made a lie, or gave in to it. Corruption and falsehood they had been kept free from, openly confessing the truth. They had not the heavenly place, but they are without fault, and they share the Lamb's earthly place and glory, accompanying Him whithersoever He goes, in the manifestation of that glory. All that led to these privileges had no place when once the kingdom was set up. It was then too late to shew faithfulness in this way. There is a connection with the heavenly saints which is not in chapter 7. The white-robed multitude stood before the throne and the Lamb. They are before the throne of God, they worship in His temple, and the Lamb comforts them. Here there is special association with the Lamb on earth, in their path and in their consequent place. It is the remnant of the Psalms (especially Ps. 1 to 41). But, though on earth with the King, they are redeemed from among men before Christ comes to earth; and the song they learn to sing is sung before the elders and living creatures. They are not with them, but they sing the song sung before them; that is, the Gentile multitude are admitted to special privileges before God and the Lamb; the Jewish remnant are associated with the Lamb on earth, and, in a certain sense, with heaven.

The progress of God's ways follows—warning to the earth to leave idolatry; for the hour of God's judgment was come. The everlasting gospel is the testimony of Christ's power, from paradise onward, as in contrast with the special announcement of the assembly, and glad

tidings connected with it. Babylon is announced to be fallen; threats and warnings to any that should own the beast; but the time is now come when dying in the Lord was to cease; only their blessedness remained henceforth. Dying and tribulation were over. They are looked at as one whole body; and while any remained yet to die, they were diers in the Lord, not rested and blessed. Now their rest is come, and their reward.

Christ then reaps the earth—separating, gathering, and judgment; and treads the winepress, exercises unmingled vengeance on the wicked. Hence in this last judgment it is the angel who had the power over fire who calls for it; it was full divine judgment. This judgment was not within the limits of Babylon—was not in the sphere in which man had formed and ordered his organisation in opposition to God. This closes the whole scene of that which the history had begun by the catching up of the Man-child to heaven. He had returned in vengeance.

An interesting question here arises—What is the vine of the earth? It is that which is the fruit-bearing organisation, or what should be so (that is the idea of it), in professed connection with God, as His planting in the earth. Israel was the vine brought out of Egypt. Christ on earth was the true vine. It is not connection with Him in heaven. There we are looked at as perfect, not to bear fruit and be pruned. But analogously it went on after He had ascended on high, and professing Christians are the branches. But here it is the vine of the earth, that which has its character and growth therein, but with the pretension to take the religious place by succession on the earth. The true saints are gone on high, or are a persecuted individual remnant. I have no doubt the Jews

will be the centre of that system then, but they will be mixed up with Gentiles, have turned to idolatry, and have seven spirits worse than that; and the apostate Gentiles will be fully associated with it all (see Isaiah 34, 63, 65, 66).

Chapter 15 is a new vision. It unrolls before the prophet another scene, the last plagues or judgments of God, and specially that of Babylon, before Christ comes. The main object of the vision was the seven angels, having the seven last plagues; but, as ever, the saints who have to do with this scene are seen in security before the judgments begin. They have been purified, but have come through the fire of tribulation too. They stand on a sea mingled with fire. They have belonged to the time when the beast and his image were in power, but they had got the victory over it. They seemed perhaps to have succumbed—it was real victory.

Their song is very peculiar. The song of Moses is triumph over the power of evil by God's judgments. The song of the Lamb is the exaltation of the rejected Messiah, of the suffering One, like whom they had suffered; for it is the slain remnant amidst unfaithful and apostate Israel whom we find here. The song celebrates God and the Lamb, but by victorious sufferers who belong to heaven. What they celebrate are the works of Jehovah Elohim Shaddai (the God of the Old Testament), but who now has manifested Himself in judgment, known by His works that are public for the people. He shewed His ways unto Moses, His works unto the children of Israel. His works are celebrated now. They are the works of Jehovah Elohim Shaddai, the Judge of all the earth. But His ways are celebrated too. There was intelligence of them, as far at least as righteous

judgment went. These ways in judgment were just and true. Israel would understand deliverance, and how it came; but Moses knew God's ways. But this is all. It is not merely celebration of qualities and attributes, as the angels do, nor the full knowledge of God's work in salvation by the blood of the Lamb. It is not the heart going up in the sense of its own relationship, but a celebration of the glory of the Lord, who would now be worshipped by the nations, for His judgments were manifested. It was intelligence when judgments were manifested, not when all was yet to be learned within the veil. This celebration of what was just bursting forth being made, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, not merely the temple with the ark of the covenant seen. That secured the result for faith, when evil was raging in power on earth; the ark of God's covenant secured Israel. It was a testimony opened out, not a covenant which secured in the hour of evil, but a testimony which made good what the ark of the covenant secured; for the temple was opened, and the messengers of judgment came forth—God's judgment for the restoration and blessing of Israel, by the judgment of the Gentiles and all who corrupted the earth. Cleanness in God's sight, and divine righteousness, characterised and animated this judgment—clean linen pure and white, and golden girdles: I apprehend the former, in answer to corruption in what should have had this—Babylon (compare chap. 19:8). That is, it was a judgment which required it, and was according to it, and also to divine righteousness. It is not brass burning in the fire—simply execution of judgment in dealing with men, though that took place—but God making good His own nature and character against corruption, the essential character of the eternal

God, which the assembly ought to have displayed; whereas Babylon was entirely the contrary, and the beast too. The seven angels judge all according to these characters of God, because it was really the avenging of what God was, as fully revealed to the assembly; but the white linen refers, I doubt not, specially to Babylon, though the men with the mark of the beast would come under the judgment. One of the four living creatures gives the vials; for it is the judicial power of God in creation, not yet the Lamb. God's glory in judgment filled the temple; and no man could have to say to Him in worship, or approaching Him, while these plagues were executing. It was the full display of God in judgment.

The first four plagues have the same objects as the judgments of the first four trumpets—the whole circle of symbolic nature, but here directly as regards men—earth, sea, rivers, and sun; the ordered prophetic sphere of God's dealings, the masses of peoples as such viewed as unorganised, the moral principles which give an impulse to their movements, and sovereign authority. But it is not a third here (that is, the Roman earth) but in general.

The first vial of wrath brought the utmost distress and shameful misery on all who had taken the mark of the beast.

The second brought the power of moral death on the mass of peoples; all who were among them within the limits of the prophetic earth, died—I apprehend, gave up mere outward profession. We have here an example of the use of symbols which it is well to note. All the vials are poured out on the earth, that is, are applied to the

sphere of already formed relationship with God. But in this there might be a special relationship in which men had to do with God in this world— were inhabiters of earth, or the mass of people within that sphere.

The third vial was poured out on all the sources of popular influence and action; and they became positively deathful. It seems to me, that the deadly influence in alienation from God, within the sphere of prophecy, is strongly marked here. Death is used generally as the expression of the power of Satan.

Then the supreme authority is made frightfully oppressive. This gave the first four of direct judgment according to the usual division.

The fifth vial strikes the throne of the beast, the seat and stability of his authority, which Satan had given him; and his kingdom became full of darkness. All was confusion and wretchedness, and no resource: they gnawed their tongues with anguish and blasphemed God.

The sixth angel pours out his vial on Euphrates—destroys, I apprehend, the securing boundary of the Western prophetic powers—not the seat of its power, but broke its frontier, that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared. I look at this simply as the bringing in of the powers of Asia into the conflict for the universal conflagration of powers. The sixth vial sends forth three unclean spirits, the sum of all evil influences: that of Satan’s direct power as antagonistic of Christ; that of the power of the last empire, the beast; and that of the second beast of chapter 13 henceforth known as the false prophet, Satan’s influence as the Antichrist, an idolatrous wonder-working power; and the kings of the

world were gathered together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. The allusion is to Judges 5:19, 20.

At the seventh vial there is a general break-up and subversion, and Babylon comes into judgment. And the hail of God, the judgment of God, came on men from heaven (compare Isaiah 32 and 33). All separate independent interests and established powers disappeared. This was over the earth—God's judgment by providence and instruments—but the Lamb was not come yet. The details of Babylon's judgments are reserved for the following chapters.

The characters of Babylon are first portrayed. Like the beast, she is only one thing in the judgment, but morally she is more important than all the rest. The general character is the great active idolatress that has gained influence over the mass of the nations; next, that the kings of the earth have lived in guilty intimacy with her, seeking her favours, while those that dwell on the earth have lost their senses through her pernicious and inebriating influence. This is the general idea first given, a character plain enough to mark the Roman or Papal system.

But more details follow. There was a woman, a religious system, sitting on an imperial beast full of names of blasphemy, having the form which marked it Roman. The woman was gorgeously and imperially arrayed, had every human glory and ornament on her, and a rich cup of prostituting yet gross idolatries in her hand. "Abominations" are simply idols; "filthiness of her fornication," all the horrible corruption that accompanies it. Her cup was full of them. She was in the desert; no springs of God were there. It was not, so to

speak, God’s land, no heavenly country. To spiritual understanding she bore on her forehead her character (yet one known only when spiritually known), of the great city of corruption, source of all seduction to men and of all idolatry in the earth: such was Popery. But this was not all. All the blood of the saints was found in her: she was the persecuting murderess of those God delighted in, and who bore witness to Jesus.166 The prophet was astonished—for it was what the church had come to.

The angel then describes the beast on which she rode. It had been, ceased to exist, and then it comes up again from direct diabolical sources—comes up out of the abyss. The renewed Roman Empire, which had disappeared, is blasphemous and diabolical in nature, and in this character goes to destruction: yet all but the elect on the earth will be in admiration of it when they see the beast that was, is not, and shall be present. Of itself this marks the Roman or Latin Empire, only that it will reappear more formally. But Rome is more distinctly marked. It is the city of the seven hills. Nor was this even all. It was the existing authority in the time of the prophecy: five of its governing powers had fallen; one was there; there was then one yet to come for a short space, and then the beast out of the abyss, the last diabolical state of the empire, would appear, and it would be destroyed. The last however is not a new form; it is one of the seven, though an eighth. My impression is, that the first Napoleon and his brief empire is the seventh, and we have now to wait for the development of the last. The beast, though imperial, has ten horns, ten distinct kingdoms. They have their power, and for the same period, with the beast. But they all give their

power to the beast, and make war against Christ, the rejected One on earth; but He shall overcome them. For, despised as He may be, supreme authority is His, and there are others coming with Him, not merely angels but called ones, His saints.

Details are then added. The waters are explained as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues—masses of populations in their diverse divisions. Next the ten horns, the kingdoms which are associated with the beast, and the beast (for so it is to be read) hate the whore and eat her flesh and burn her with fire (first, take all her substance and fatness, and then destroy her); for they are to give their kingdom to the blasphemous beast until God's words are fulfilled. And then we are expressly told that the woman (not "the whore "—the last is her corrupt idolatrous character—but the "woman"), who as riding the beast was to be such, is Rome. All this chapter (17) is description.

Chapter 18 announces the judgment. The one difficulty here is verse 4, coming where it is; but, as every difficulty in scripture, it leads into further light. The destruction of Babylon is simple enough. She falls by God's judgment just before Christ comes to judge the earth; and, first perhaps losing her power and influence, is destroyed by the horns and beast. The comparison of chapter 14:8, and the place it holds, chap. 16:19; 18:8, and the beginning of 19, make this plain. Chapter 18 is a warning from heaven, not the angel of judgment of the earth. It is not consequent on events, but supposes spiritual apprehension of heaven's mind. This is the case when it is simply a voice from heaven. This call then was a spiritual call, not a manifest judgment. It may be more urgent and direct just before judgment, and I doubt not

will be: as the call is in Hebrews to come out of the camp because Jerusalem's day was at hand. Hence I believe this applies whenever we see the system to be Babylon, and the sense of her iniquities is pressed upon the conscience.

The chapter then goes on to the actual execution of judgment according to chapter 17:16. The horns, or kingdoms connected with the beast, have destroyed her. The kings mourn over her; so do those that have sought profit and ease and commerce in the earth. The royal and commercial system is shattered to pieces by the upset of the system. What characterises her, that for which she is judged, is idolatry, corruption, worldliness, and persecution. She is judged and destroyed, and the prosperity of the worldly is smitten by her fall, and the hopes of the kings who had commerce with her. The blood of all saints was found in her, as in Jerusalem in her day. Persecution comes from religion connected with worldly advantage. But what a picture we have here of the world, the relations of the kings and of the saints to Babylon! {Rev 19:2}

Chapter 19:2 clearly shews the aspect in which she is judged—the great whore who corrupted; and God avenges the blood of His servants. This judgment of Rome is the great joy of heaven. Hallelujah and salvation are sung. The elders and four living creatures fall down and worship, and the voice of the multitude proclaims the bringing in of the marriage of the Lamb, when the false woman is set aside. Till then, though espoused, the assembly was not thus actually united in the heavenly marriage of the Lamb. Still there was no greater event could be than a judgment of Rome. No doubt the beast had to be destroyed. Power, when God gave it scope,

would soon do that. But here the old corruptress and persecutor was set aside for ever. Heaven is full of joy. There is no celebration of joy like this in the Revelation.

The rest of the book is simple and clear enough, for the mystery of God is closed. I do not myself attach any importance to the distinction, as a class, of those called to partake of the joy of that day. It means, I believe, just that, according to the parable of the marriage of the king's son, the guests are those who have share in the marriage joy. But several points have to be noticed: God in power has come in to set up His reign.

The true though not yet the open seat of the power of evil has been judged and destroyed. Two characters of evil, falsehood or deceitful corruption and violence, have existed since Satan himself began his career; false in himself, he was a murderer to others. The mystery of iniquity contained both, though hiding the latter and using others for it. Still she was characterised by corruption and what was false. Direct violence was in the hands of the beast. The destruction of that would, no doubt, relieve the earth of oppression; but for heaven and all that was heavenly-minded, the destruction of this Christ-dishonouring, soul-enslaving, and soul-debasing corruption, was joy and gladness, and the witness that divine power had come in. It had set aside the worst evil, the corrupting what was God's under pretence of being what Christ had purchased for Himself, the one precious object of His especial love. They sing, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!"

This was to make way for the introduction of what was His own—the manifest power of His Christ. But, before that, the assembly must have her place of association

with Him in that— must have Himself: the marriage of the Lamb is come. Till the evil woman had been set aside, this could not be. This is the character of heavenly joy and redemption by which we are brought into it. Man on earth is first good, then yielding to temptation. Redemption supposes first evil, and even slavery to it, but then deliverance from it and our being set beyond it, God having taken to Him His power. The assembly is presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, cleansed and white, suited to Christ. The apostle was disposed, in sight of all this blessedness, to fall down and worship him who had revealed it. His mind was thrown into devotion by these scenes. Its immediate object was the heavenly messenger, and he turns to bow to him, but is forbidden. He was a fellow-servant, and the same to all who had the testimony of Jesus; for the spirit of prophecy, we are told, is the testimony of Jesus. The testimony not to worship intermediate beings is the last warning left to a declining assembly, as, so to speak, one of the first (in Colossians).

We now arrive at the great announcement of the coming of Christ in power. Heaven, which had been opened on Jesus and to Stephen, now opens for Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. Holy and true He had been known by faith, and the faithful and true Witness. The last He is now; not as witness, but in judgment, save as judgment itself is the witness of His faithfulness and truth. The characters in which He appears are plain but all-important. It is first in general judgment but in the form of war, not what we may call sessional judgment, but overcoming power. Sessional judgment is in chapter 20 from verse 4. His eyes have the piercingness of divine judgment. He had many crowns, witness of His

various and universal dominion. But, though thus revealed as man, He had a glory none could penetrate into;167 of which He had the conscious power, but which was not revealed. He was the avenger—His garment was dipped in blood. All characterised Him, we may note here, according to that in which He is manifested by the judgment itself. It was the Revealer, the Word of God—His eternal character—what He was before creation; now making it good in judgment.

The armies in heaven had not garments dipped in blood. They were triumphant; they followed Him in His triumph, pure and perfect, His chosen, called, and faithful ones. The vengeance of Idumea was not their part, though they share His victory over the beast. The vengeance in Edom had a more earthly character, and is connected more with Judah. The Assyrian is there (see Psa. 83), not the beast. The beast and the false prophet are destroyed by Him as coming from heaven. He smites the nations with the rod of His mouth, He rules them with a rod of iron: this the saints will have with Him (chap. 2:26, 27). He treads the wine-press too.168 This is the part that is more earthly, as Isaiah 63 shews. So He that sits on the cloud thrusts in His sickle on the earth. It was an angel who cast the grapes into the wine-press, and the winepress was trodden169—it is not said, as by one sitting on the cloud. The character of the judgment of the beast and the false prophet is heavenly —it is the Word of God, the Lord from heaven; the wine-press is earthly. He is publicly, officially, and intrinsically King of kings, and Lord of lords. The beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire: this was a present final judgment—the rest were judicially slain. The final judgment of these deceived ones is not said to

take place here. Satan is not yet cast into the lake of fire, but into the bottomless pit, where the legion of devils besought the Lord they might not be sent. He is bound there so. as not to deceive the nations for a thousand years. There will be no seduction by Satan during the thousand years.

We now come, evil power having been set aside, to the exercise of judicial authority in peace; and this is conferred on the saints. The prophet does not merely see the thrones as set in Daniel 7, but sitters on them too. Besides all to whom judgment is given in general, two special classes are mentioned, because they might seem to be too late, or to have lost their part: those beheaded (after the assembly was gone, for it is the Revelation-period we have to do with) for the witness of Jesus; and those who had not worshipped the beast (compare chap. 6:9-11; 13:15). These, as well as previously departed saints, had their part in living and reigning with Christ a thousand years. But those who were not Christ's, the rest of the dead, did not live again till the thousand years were over.170 These were finally delivered from the second death. The first death they had undergone, the natural wages of sin, but in faithfulness; in the second death, the final judgment against sin, they would have no part. It could have no power over them. On the contrary, they had special relationship with God and Christ, they were priests of God and of Christ, and would reign with Him a thousand years. They also are priests and kings. Note how God and Christ are here united in one thought, as continually in the writings of John. Thus the beast and the false prophet are in the lake of fire, their armies slain, and Satan bound in the abyss, and the risen saints are

priests of God and Christ, reigning with Christ a thousand years. The details and effects, mark, are not given here. The object is to give the place of the saints, and especially of the sufferers, during the time of this book. The rest come in as a general fact, there were sitters on thrones of judgment; but the faithful of the prophecy are specially mentioned.

When the thousand years are finished, Satan is let loose again. He comes up on the earth, but he never gets up to heaven again. But the nations are tested by his temptation. Not even having seen Christ and enjoyed the fruits of His glory—no mere means can secure the heart of man, if it is to be depended upon; and men fall, in number as the sand of the sea, into Satan's hands as soon as tempted; enjoying blessing, where unfaithfulness would have been present loss (perhaps cutting off) and there was nothing to tempt them, but unfaithful as soon as they are tempted, as soon as the heart is tried. It was the last and needed trial of man; needed because they could not have finally enjoyed God with natural hearts, and the natural heart had not been tested where present blessing was on the side of owning a present, visible, glorious Christ. The deceived multitude, not limited now to a third of the earth or a special prophetic district but taking in the breadth of the earth, went up against the camp of the saints, and surrounded it and the beloved city, Jerusalem. It is remarkable here, there is no special presence of Christ amongst them. They are left apparently to be surrounded by their enemies. The Lord has allowed all this testing separation of personal faithfulness. Had He appeared, of course these hostile crowds could not have come up, nor would the thorough trial of the heart have

proved the faithfulness of the saints, who would not follow the seductions of Satan. They are pressed upon and surrounded by the enemy, but faithful. Once this separation and full testing had been accomplished, God's judgment fell on them from heaven, and destroyed them. The devil was then cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet were already, where they are tormented for ever and ever.

This closed the exercise of wrath, of the destruction of hostile power—a wondrous scene—that God should have enemies in this world! Now judicial power, as such, seated in its own right, comes in. It may be remarked, that the exercise of this on the quick, forms no part of the contents of this book. The hostile power of the beast was destroyed by Him who judges and makes war, the heavenly saints having been taken to glory. The crowds of apostates at the end of the thousand years are destroyed by fire from heaven. But the judgment of Matthew 25 is not found here, unless there be a possible connection with the judgment of chapter 20:4.

There now comes the judgment of the dead. There is no coming here. A great white throne is set; judgment is carried on according to the purity of God's nature. It was no dealing with the earth, or the power of evil, but with souls. Heaven and earth—all mere scenes of judgment—disappear. The secrets of men's hearts are judged by Him who knows them all. Heaven and earth flee away before the face of Him that sat on the throne, and the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. Judgment was according to works, as it was written in the books of record. Still another element was brought into view. Sovereign grace alone had saved according to the purpose of God.171 There was a book of life.

Whosoever was not written there was cast into the lake of fire. But it was the finally closing and separating scene for the whole race of men and this world. And though they were judged every man according to his works, yet sovereign grace only had delivered any; and whoever was not found in grace's book was cast into the lake of fire. The sea gave up the dead in it; death and hades, the dead in them. And death and hades were put an end to for ever by the divine judgment. The heaven and earth passed away, but they were to be revived; but death and hades never. There was for them only divine destruction and judgment. They are looked at as the power of Satan. He has the power of death and the gates of hades; and hence these are for ever destroyed judicially. They will never have power again. They are personified; but of course there is no question of tormenting them or of punishment: when the devil himself is cast in, there is. But death was not then destroyed; for the wicked dead had not been raised for judgment. Now they had; and the last enemy is destroyed. The force of the image, I doubt not, is that all the dead now judged (the whole contents of hades, in whom the power of death had been) were cast into the lake of fire, so that death and hades, which had no existence but in their state, were entirely and judicially ended by their being cast in. The saints had long before passed out of them; but they subsisted in the wicked. Now these were, consequent on the judgment of the white throne, cast into the lake of fire— the second death. The limit and measure of escape was the book of life.

But there was a new heaven and a new earth; but no more sea—no separation, nor part of the world not

brought into an ordered earth before God. Here we do not find any mediatorial kingdom. The Lamb is not in the scene. God is all in all. No sorrow or crying more, no earthly people of God distinct from the inhabiters of the earth. These are God's people, and God is with them Himself, but withal His tabernacle is with them. This is the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The assembly has her own character, is the habitation of God in a special way, when the unchanging state comes, and all is made new. God is the end, as the beginning. Him that is athirst now God will refresh with the fountain of the water of life— the overcomer shall inherit all things. The world for the Christian is now a great Rephidim. This is the twofold portion of the final blessedness: he shall have God for his God, and be His son. Those who feared this path— did not overcome the world and Satan but had walked in iniquity— would have their part in the lake of fire. This closes the history of God's ways.

What follows is the description of the heavenly city, as before we had that of Babylon. Its heavenly character and millennial connection with the earth is revealed. One of the seven angels, as in the case of Babylon, comes to shew the prophet the bride, the Lamb's wife. The result of judgment on the earth is the introduction of better and higher blessings. The prophet is taken, like Moses, to see the scene of promise, and sees New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. This was its double character from God, divine in its origin, and also heavenly (compare 2 Cor. 5:1). It might be of God and earthly. It might be heavenly and angelic. It was neither: it was divine in origin and heavenly in nature and character. It was clothed with divine glory: it must be as founded on Christ's work. It was transparent

jasper; jasper being used as a symbol of divine glory (chap. 4:3). It is secure, having a wall great and high. It has twelve gates. Angels are become the willing doorkeepers of the great city, the fruit of Christ's redemption-work in glory. This marked the possession, too, by man thus brought in the assembly to glory, of the highest place in the creation, and providential order of God, of which angels had previously been the administrators. The twelve gates are full of human perfectness of governmental administrative power. The gate was the place of judgment. Twelve, we have often seen, denotes perfection and governmental power. The character of it is noted by the names of the twelve tribes. God had so governed these. They were not the foundation; but this character of power was found there. There were twelve foundations, but these were the twelve apostles of the Lamb. They were, in their work, the foundation of the heavenly city. Thus the creative and providential display of power, the governmental (Jehovah), and the assembly once founded at Jerusalem, are all brought together in the heavenly city, the organised seat of heavenly power. It is not presented as the bride, though it be the bride, the Lamb's wife. It is not in the Pauline character of nearness of blessing to Christ. It is the assembly as founded at Jerusalem under the twelve—the organised seat of heavenly power, the new and now heavenly capital of God's government. They had suffered and served the Lamb in the earthly, and under Him founded the heavenly. It is alike vast and perfect, and all measured and owned of God. It is not now a remnant measured; it is the city. It has not divine perfectness (that could not be), but it has divinely given perfectness. It is a cube, equal on every side, finite perfection. So the wall (they are merely symbols) was

perfect, 12 x 12. The wall which secured it was the divine glory. As it is written of the earthly Jerusalem, “Salvation hath God appointed for walls and bulwarks.”

The city was formed, in its nature, in divine righteousness and holiness—gold transparent as glass. That which was now by the word wrought in and applied to men below, was the very nature of the whole place (compare Eph. 4:24). The precious stones, or varied display of God’s nature, who is light, in connection with the creature (seen in creation, Ezekiel 28; in grace in the high priest’s breast-plate), now shone in permanent glory, and adorned the foundations of the city. The gates had the moral beauty, which attracted Christ in the assembly and in a glorious way. That on which men walked, instead of bringing danger of defilement, was itself righteous and holy; the streets, all that men came in contact with, were righteousness and holiness—gold transparent as glass.

There was no concealment of God’s glory in that which awed by its display—no temple where men approached but where they could not draw nigh, where God was hidden. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were its temple. They were approached in their own nature and glory, surrounded only by that fully displayed. Nor was there need of created light here; the glory of the divine nature lighted all, and the Lamb was the light-bearer in it. Note here, we have not the Father as the temple. It is the revealed dispensational Ruler, the true God, and the Lamb who has made good His glory. This was the character of the city.

The vision goes on to shew its relationship to those on the earth, and its inhabitants: a seeming inconsistency,

but no real one; for the city is viewed as the estate of the bride. Where the inhabitants are spoken of, it is the individual blessing. The nations, spared in the judgments on earth, walk in the light of it; the world does, in a measure, in that of the assembly now. Then the glory will be perfect. The city enjoys the direct light within; the world transmitted light of glory. To it the kings of the earth bring their honour and glory. They own the heavens and the heavenly kingdom to be the source of all, and bring there the homage of their power. Night, there is not there, and its gates are ever open; no defence against evil is needed, though divine security leaves no approach to evil. The kings themselves bring their willing homage to it. But the glory and honour of the Gentiles is brought to it too. Heaven is seen as the source of all the glory and honour of this world. Hence these are now true. Nothing defiling enters there, nor what introduces idols and falsehood. Neither man's evil nor Satan's deceit can exist or produce any corruption there. How often, when anything good is set up now, the considerate heart knows that evil will enter, and Satan deceive and corrupt! There we have the certainty that this can never be. It was not merely the absence of evil, but the impossibility of its entrance, which characterised the holy city. There was that which, having its source in perfect grace, involves all blessed affections in connection with the Lamb in those within the city. Those only whose names were in the Lamb's book of life found place in the city.

The connection of the holy city with the earth, though not on it, is everywhere seen. The river of God refreshed the city, and the tree of life, whose fruits ever ripe were food for the celestial inhabitants of it, bore in its leaves

healing for the nations. Only the glorified ever ate the fruit of constant growth; but what was manifested and displayed without, as the leaves of a tree, was blessing to those on earth. We see grace characterising the assembly in glory. The nation and kingdom that will not serve the earthly Jerusalem shall utterly perish—it preserves its earthly royal character; the assembly its own: the leaves of the tree it feeds on are for healing. There is no more curse. The throne of God and the Lamb is in it. This is the source of blessing, not of curse; and His servants serve Him; often they cannot as they would here. Note too again here, how God and the Lamb are spoken of as one, as constantly in John's writings. His servants shall have the fullest privilege of His constant presence, shall see His face, and their belonging to Him as His own be evident to all. There is no night there, nor need of light, for the Lord God gives it; and, as to their state, they reign, not for the thousand years, as they do over the earth, but for ever and ever.

This closes the description of the heavenly city and the whole prophetic volume. What follows consists of warning, or the final expression of the thoughts of, and relationship with, Christ of the assembly.

The angel declares the truth of these things, and that the Lord God of the prophets—not as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor as directly teaching the assembly as dwelling in it by the Spirit—the Lord God of the prophets has sent His angel to inform His servants of these events. "Behold," says Christ, speaking as of old, in the prophetic spirit, rising up to His now personal testimony, "Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." The assembly is viewed, not as the subject of prophecy, but

as “the things that are,” time not being counted, specially time to come. Those that keep it are those concerned in the book, who are warned that Christ will soon be there. No doubt we all can profit by it, but we are not in the scenes it speaks of. John, impressed with the dignity of the messenger, fell down and would have worshipped him. But the saints of the assembly, even if made prophets of, were not to return into the uncertainty of ancient days. The angel was a simple angel, John’s fellow-servant, and fellow-servant of his brethren the prophets: he was to worship God. Nor were the sayings to be sealed, as with Daniel: the time was at hand. When it closed its testimony, men would remain in the same state for judgment or blessing. And Christ would quickly come, and every man receive as his work was. Verse 7 was a warning, in form of blessing, to those in the circumstances referred to, to keep the sayings of the book, but this verse 12 is the record of Christ’s coming to the general judgment of the quick.

Finally, Christ announces Himself, having taken up the word in Person in verse 12, as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end—God before and after all; and filling duration. I suppose we are to take as the true reading: “Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” The redeemed, cleansed ones, can enter there and feed on the tree of life; for I suppose it is the fruit here. Without are the unclean and violent, and those who love satanic falsehood and idolatry, sin against purity, against their neighbour, against God, and follow Satan.

This closes the summing up. The Lord Jesus now reveals Himself in His own Person, speaking to John and the

saints, and declares who He is, in what character He appears to say it to them. “I am the root and offspring of David”—the origin and heir of the temporal promises of Israel; but much more than that—He is the bright and morning Star. It is what He is before He appears, in both respects; only the former regards Israel born of the seed of David according to the flesh. But the Lord has taken another character. He has not yet arisen as the Sun of righteousness on this benighted globe; but, to faith, the dawn is there, and the assembly sees Him in the now far-spent night as the morning Star, knows Him, while watching according to His own word, in His bright heavenly character— a character which does not wake a sleeping world, but is the delight and joy of those who watch. When the sun arises, He will not be thus known: the earth will never so know Him, bright as the day may be. When Christ is in this place, the Spirit dwells in the assembly below, and the assembly has its own relationship. It is the bride of Christ, and her desire is toward Him.

Thus “the Spirit and the bride say, Come.” It is not a warning from one coming as a judge and a rewarder, but the revelation of Himself which awakens the desire of the bride according to the relationship in which grace has set her. Nor is it a mere sentiment or wish: the Spirit who dwells in the assembly leads and suggests her thought. But the Spirit turns also, and the heart of him who enjoys the relationship, to others. “Let him that heareth”—let him who hears the voice of the Spirit in the assembly—join in the cry, and say, Come. It is one common hope, it should be our common desire; and the sense of what is coming on the earth, and the sense of failure in things that are, ought only, though it be in

truth an inferior motive, to urge the cry in all. But while still here, the saint has another place also. Not only do his desires go after God upwards and the heavenly Bridegroom, but he reflects God's known character, by having His nature and Spirit as manifested also in Christ's love, and in possession of the living water, though not of the Bridegroom. He turns round and invites others, "Let him that is athirst come," and proclaims it forth then to the world, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Thus the whole place of the heavenly saint, conscious of the assembly's place, is brought out in this verse, from his desire of Christ's coming, to his call to whosoever will to come.

The integrity of the book is preserved by a solemn warning of the danger of losing a part in the tree of life172 and the holy city. Christ then cheers the saint's heart, by assuring that He would quickly come; and the heart of the true saint responds with unfeigned and earnest desire, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." And then, with the salutation of grace, the book closes, leaving the promise and the desire as the last words of Jesus on the heart.

Let the reader note here that, in the beginning and end of the book, before and after the prophetic statements, we have in a beautiful way the conscious position of the saints.

The first, at the opening of the whole book, gives the individual conscious blessing through what Christ has done; the latter, the whole position of the assembly, thus distinguishing clearly the saints under the gospel from those whose circumstances are prophetically made known to them in this book. "Unto him that loved us,

and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests to God and his Father." As soon as Christ is named (and it is so in both cases), it awakens in the saints the consciousness of Christ's love and their own place in relationship with Him. They are already washed from their sins in His own blood, and made kings and priests to God and His Father—have their place and state fixed, before any of the prophetic part is developed, and in the coming kingdom will enjoy that place, not of being blessed under Christ, but of being associated with Him. Here they have their place simply in the kingdom and priesthood; it is individual title resulting from His first coming. They are loved, washed in His own blood, and associated with Him in the kingdom.

At the end of the book, Christ is revealed as the morning Star, a place forming no part of the prophecy, but that in which the assembly, who has waited for Him, is associated with Him for herself, and the kingdom (compare the promise to the overcomers in Thyatira). 173 This draws out active love (not as before, simply being loved and what we are made)— love first directed towards Christ in the assembly's known relation to Himself, then to the saints who hear, then to the thirsty, then to all the world. The desire of the assembly, as the bride with whom the Spirit is, is directed to Christ's second coming for herself—to the possessing the morning Star; then the Spirit turns to the saints, calling on them to say to Jesus, Come—to join in this desire. But we have the Spirit though not the Bridegroom; hence whoever is athirst is called on to come and drink, and thus the gospel proclaimed abroad, "Whosoever will, let

him take the water of life freely." It is love acting in the saint all round from Christ to sinners in the world.

150 This was morally true from Acts 3, where the Jewish leaders refuse the testimony to a glorified Christ who would return, as they had rejected a humbled One. Acts 7, by the mouth of Stephen, closes God's dealings with them in testimony, and the heavenly gathering begins, his spirit being received on high. The destruction of Jerusalem closed Jewish history judicially.

151 Paul, of course, is in no way noticed. For him the assembly belonged to heaven—was the body of Christ, the house of God. He was a builder.

152 And hence in particular assemblies, which of course could be judged and removed. There is another point of divine wisdom here. Though we have, I doubt not, the whole history of the assembly to its end in this world, it is given in facts then present, so that there should be no putting off the coming of the Lord. So, in the parables, the virgins who go to sleep are the same that wake up; the servants that receive the talents are the same found on the Lord's return, though we know ages have passed and death come in.

153 Note this immensely important principle: the church judged by the word, not the church a judge; and the individual Christian called to give heed to this judgment. The church (I use the word designedly here as used to claim this authority) cannot be an authority when the Lord calls me, if I have ears to hear, to hear and receive the judgment pronounced by Him on it. I judge its state by the words of the Spirit, am bound to do so: it cannot be an authority therefore on the Lord's behalf over me

in that state. Discipline is not in question here, but the church as wielding authority.

154 There are moral reasons from the contents. We shall see, farther on, that the structure of the book fully confirms this.

155 We shall find the same thing at the close when the prophecy is ended. Here what He has been to the saints and has done: there what He is for the future. See chapter 22:17.

156 1 Timothy 6:15.

157 Revelation 19:16.

158 Except in some parts of the world, those called bishops are always bishops of a city, shewing historically that dioceses are a subsequent arrangement. Angels were not chief officers of the synagogue.

159 His character too was for judgment among the assemblies and the assembly on earth; not His own bride, but the outward body here on earth.

160 For the judgment at the end, though governmental, closing earth's history, was not merely so (cherubic), but according to God's holiness and nature (seraphic), particularly as in Isaiah 6, a known God in Israel.

161 That is, "having "does not apply to elders only.

162 It is very possible that the plural "righteousnesses" is a Hebraism for righteousness. It is a common case in moral things. At any rate it is of the saints.

163 Where the throne is set for judgment, it is characterised only by what proceeds directly from God. There are no earthquakes and hail; here there are.

164 I do not continue to put the voice as Christ's. The application to Him is too questionable.

165 We are not to be surprised, therefore, if the beast at the end had only local empire, though originally God had given universal empire to the beasts: how widely exercised we know.

166 It is important to remark that formal religion, which rests on ancient claims as established, and which is left behind as to the truth by others who have received it, is the regular habitual instigator of persecution, though others may be the persecutors. So it was with the Jews, so in the universal history of the world. It always becomes false as regards truth, though it may retain some and important truths. The truths which test the heart and its obedience are not there.

167 So it was as to His Person and service. No one knew the Son but the Father. It was the secret of His rejection. He was that, and so necessarily such in the world. But the world under Satan's influence would not have that. In His humiliation His divine glory was maintained in the unsounded depths of His Person. Now He is revealed in glory; but there ever remained what none could search or penetrate into—His own Person and nature. His revealed name was the Word of God. As revealing God in grace or power so as to make Him known, we know Him. But His Person as Son always remains unsearchable. His name is written, so that we know it is unknowable—not unknown but unknowable. But He made good now the character and requirements of God in respect of men—what they ought to be with God, and what God was to them in their natural relationship, revealed in respect of

their responsibility. Judgment refers to these, and to ourselves.

168 This too He does alone; not that the saints may not be with Him as His cortege, so to speak, but the execution of judgment is His. In Isaiah it is only said that of the people none were with Him. In sessional judgment, judgment is given to them.

169 I have already stated that the harvest is discriminative judgment: there is wheat for the garner. The wine-press is vengeance, righteous vengeance.

170 It may be noted here that, according to the true reading, the living and reigning is certainly resurrection. “The rest of the dead lived not until,” etc. ‘, so that it is clearly used here for resurrection, as the following words confirm: “This is the first resurrection.”

171 Thus purpose and man’s responsibility are never confounded, but, from the two trees of the garden on, are in juxtaposition; life brought into connection with responsibility in the law, responsibility being put first, and thus proof given that man cannot stand before God; but the question is solved only in Christ, who bore our sins, died for us to sin, and is life. Counsels and promise of life in Christ come first, then responsibility in the creature on earth, then grace making good counsels, in righteousness, through the cross.

172 The true reading here is “tree,” not “book “; but the book of life is not life, nor is our being written there final, though a prima facie register, unless indeed written there before the foundation of the world: but, even so, it is not the same thing as the possession of life.

173 Compare the place of the bright cloud in Luke 9. There it is the Father’s voice.