Lectures on Ephesians

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Ephesians 1

Lectures on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, to the Ephesians with a new translation.

It must be manifest to the most casual reader of the epistle that we are upon very high and holy ground here. Let none suppose that this is to impeach other portions of the inspired scriptures. But who can deny that in revealing His mind, God has been pleased to employ different instruments and with various measures? He could, if He pleased, have written all by one. He could have revealed Himself by all according to the full height of His own glory and nothing else. But we may be quite sure that the ways of God are as admirable in the forms which His revelation takes, as in all other things which He has made for His praise. These diverse manners of developing His nature and character, His counsels and ways, display His glory in an infinitely more blessed light than if there had been one unvarying blaze of brightness. And the same wisdom which works best for His majesty and praise, is precisely that which is suited to the wants, and efficacious for the blessing of His children. Need I say, that a revelation, while it is from God is for His people? No doubt, it does glorify Him; but God, when He speaks, has an object in view, and provides graciously for those to whom He addresses Himself. The revelations of God, therefore, while they flow from God, and are worthy of God, necessarily pre-suppose, and are adapted to, the condition of man. Now this, far from, in the smallest degree, lessening the divine glory which manifests itself in the successive parts of God’s word, on the contrary, enhances it

infinitely, and proves that it is His, by nothing more than its wonderful suitability to poor sinners, brought out of their low estate, in His rich mercy, and adopted into His family by faith in Christ Jesus.

Now, of all the epistles of St. Paul, I am not aware of any one which rises so high as this to the Ephesians; and one cannot doubt that there was a harmony between the condition of these saints themselves, and the manner and measure of the Spirit's communications to them. We find it so elsewhere. In addressing the saints at Rome, they were not called a church; they were, indeed, in an infantine state. There were blessed saints of God there, but the assembly was not founded by an apostle. Years passed before ever an apostle went to Rome. God saw well that this very city of Rome would arrogate to itself enormous claims of a spiritual character. Therefore He took care that more inconsiderable places, such as Corinth, etc., should have an apostle to found churches and labour there for a considerable time; while the great centre of the world's glory was unvisited by an apostle till there were many assembled there, through persons going thither from one cause and another. When we consider the circumstances of the Roman saints, we can understand the propriety of addressing an epistle to them which strongly resembles a comprehensive scheme of christian doctrine from the very alphabet of truth. And, hence, the very first thing that we have proved there, after the introduction, is the total ruin of man, and of man looked at in every point of view — man examined, and weighed in the balances of God, from the flood downwards. After man had possessed a knowledge of God of an outward sort, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God. In fact we have the origin of

idolatry shown; and also the time after the flood before idolatry came in. The verses I have referred to in Romans 1, bear upon the time when there was simply the race possessing the knowledge of God. But man departed from it, corrupting himself; and we have the awful picture of human depravity traced in the early chapters. Next, we have philosophic man; and then man under the law — man in every point of view — before the subject of redemption is treated of, or anything is said of the way to be justified. The reason is this: the apostle never having been there, the saints at Rome were comparatively ignorant, and required to be instructed in the nature and fatal issues of the fall. They needed to learn what the history of man is, as God looks at and thinks of it. Therefore, we have him seen as ruined in every way, and no help for him in the creature, the law, or anything else. Hence the result is, that all are gone out of the way: “there is none righteous, no, not one.” In a word, every mouth is stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God. Then, and not till then, we have the provision God has made in His righteous mercy for man, in Romans 3 and Romans 4; and from Romans 5, consequences shown and difficulties met, winding up with the triumphant conclusion of Romans 7.

What a weighty summary of christian doctrine, beginning with the actual condition of man, Jew or Gentile, and leading up to the firm footing God has given in Christ, dead and risen, to him that believes! But in all this you have, most important as it is; only the individual. It may be man lost, or man saved; but you have nothing about the Church. It is what pertains to those who are members of the Church, but no such thing appears as the assembly of God treated as such. Man’s

ruin and redemption is the theme, with the effects of redemption, and the order of the dispensations, and the practical duties flowing from all. But in Ephesians how totally different! Here, comparatively speaking, man disappears, and God is viewed as acting from Himself.

Hence there is no preface nor proof of what man's state is. This was not necessary, nor is it the starting-point of the teaching there: in Romans it is; and nothing can be more simple. But in Ephesians, instead of our being raised up from the pit of corruption, in which man lay buried, the very first thing the apostle does is to speak of God in heaven. It is God showering blessing upon man, and not man brought up to God. It is God shown in the ways of His grace and the thoughts of His heart, before even there was a world at all, entirely apart from all questions of Jews or Gentiles. It is God forming a scheme of glory and blessedness for His own praise; God delighting in the display of His goodness, and this for the purpose of blessing, and the very highest, fullest character of blessing. Hence you will find that it is not simply God as God acting towards man, but He has Christ before Him, and hence there is no limit to the blessing. He would have some channel of grace toward us to the full content of His own heart. Now there is no object that could draw out and sustain the delight of God, none that could be in itself an adequate object to look upon with complacency but one, even Christ. As for the angels, He charges them with folly, and yet were they holy. If He scanned lower than the angels, what is there but a world lost in sin? Thus there is but one capable of satisfying the heart and affections of God — Christ Himself.

Having therefore this great truth in hand — God blessing, and Christ the object before God, through whom God is going to bless, according to all that is in His heart, we also find that He is named as a Blesser in a twofold manner. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” These two titles are really the key to the epistle. And I must be permitted to press strongly the importance of weighing words in Scripture. When we have to do with mankind, we must not make a person an offender for a word. But God needs no excuses for His word. Whatever allowance we might make for the slips of one another, with Scripture the occasion can never arise. When we draw near and listen to Him, the only proper attitude is to bow and worship. And, therefore, in this epistle, which is so full an expression of His love, the apostle opens it thus, “Blessed be the God and Father,” etc. He could not write to the Ephesians without breaking out into the praise and worship of God. Elsewhere you will find him blessing God, but where he does so, as in 2 Corinthians 2:14, there were special circumstances that called it out. But not so here. At Corinth there was a blessed intervention of God’s grace, breaking down the proud hearts of wayward disciples there, making them ashamed of themselves. But in Ephesians it was apart from passing circumstances, save that he saw them in such a condition of soul that they were capable of going on with God, entering into His thoughts and counsels. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” was not because of some peculiar mercy, or comfort; but it flows from what He always is to us. For this very reason many saints may be unable to enter in. Some are apt to be particularly alive to, and touched by,

sensible tokens, from day to day, and now and then extraordinary providential interventions of God. Perhaps they are in great trial, and God brings them a fresh blessing too out of it. But here the Ephesians were so simple and willing to go on with God that the apostle, instead of being detained by their state, could but speak in praise and thanksgiving. It is very blessed when there is such happy communion given in having to do with one another.

It is true, again, that before he enters upon what I shall endeavour to develop, he introduces himself as an apostle. He does not say “servant” here; in writing to the Romans he does. “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ.” He was indeed Christ’s bondman. Why should Paul be writing to them? He was His servant. Did not they belong to Jesus? There was no such thought as “independency” sanctioned in those days — no such practice as little districts or assemblies belonging to this man or that; but the Church everywhere the loved object of the Lord’s servants. He is a true servant who is able to realize that he is the bondsman of Jesus Christ; and he will serve souls best who most realizes what it is to serve the Lord. “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called [to be] an apostle.” He was an apostle by the calling of God. At this time there was no such thing as a congregation giving a candidate “a call.” Paul was an apostle called of God, and they were saints called of God, and they knew it. It was very sweet for them to think they had been thus called. They were in their measure treading the path of Christ, and the apostle was His servant and an apostle also. His object was to bring his apostleship into relief. But they at Corinth were in danger of beginning to stand in doubt of him and of

thinking that to Jerusalem they ought to look. He thoroughly owns the common place of a brother; but if persons like the Corinthians were raising their heads too high, he says, “an apostle” simply, without adding “servant.” If a dispute arose about the point, he proves the reality of his call. In addressing the Galatians I have shown elsewhere what peculiar force there is in his introduction of himself. “Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man),” etc. Here you have controversy at once, but of divine temper and strength. There were false principles in Galatia, and therefore he uses energetic, urgent language in writing to the saints They were adopting Jewish notions about earthly succession. The apostle, therefore, takes the very highest ground, and shows that while he fully acknowledged the twelve in their place, he would not, in what touched the truth of the gospel, give place by subjection, no, not for an hour; so that the whole epistle bears the stamp of the unqualified re-assertion of the call of grace and its heavenly character, founded upon the death and resurrection of Christ.

In Ephesians he has no object of a controversial kind, nor of laying down the christian foundations of truth, as in the case of the Roman saints. But he does put forward his apostolic function — “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” He shows fully out of what it sprang; that same “will of God,” out of which flowed their own blessing. He is about to trace, first the individual blessing, and then the corporate. It is quite a mistake to suppose that the former is a deeper thing than the latter. On the contrary, our highest blessings are connected with what we have as individuals. Fully acknowledging the blessedness of what is corporate, what we have individually is higher

still; and it is the way of God's Spirit to begin with this before entering upon what is common. Hence I think he here addresses "the saints which were at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus," as such. They were the, Church there, not only gathered formally, but intelligently so. They had had the Apostle Paul there, who had been God's instrument in that work. There were twelve men who believed before Paul went there; but they never received the Holy Ghost after the Pentecost sort till Paul's visit. It is the personal presence of the Holy Ghost, founded upon our faith in Christ dead and risen, that brings us into this church character. But the Holy Ghost, besides making us members of Christ's body, the Church, also gives us the consciousness of our relationship as sons with His God and Father. He addresses "the Church of God at Corinth" as such, when he is speaking of points that concern order and discipline. Here he is going to look at the Church in a far higher point of view; yet he begins with what is individual: "To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Then he introduces the twofold title of God already referred to — the same that our Lord announced when He rose from the dead, and sent the first message given to His disciples, by Mary Magdalene: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" — not "to the Almighty God," or "to Jehovah."

Our Lord stood in a twofold relation to God; He was Son of God, not only as a divine person, but as man in the world (Luke 1); besides His highest personal glory which shines through John's Gospel, etc. "That holy thing

which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." This last title refers to Christ, viewed in humanity in this world; and it is therefore stated only in the Gospel of Luke, which is pre-eminently the human biography, if I may so speak, of Christ. But it might not have been known, unless God has told us, that He carried that same relationship as man into His resurrection. He teaches us that death and resurrection gave Him title in God's righteousness to put us in His position. So that He could for the first time say, in the fulness of meaning which those words convey, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." He is now not merely "my Father" and "my God," but "your Father" and "your God."

The death of Christ had completely obliterated all that was against the children of God: the resurrection of Christ, after redemption was effected, enabled Him to give them His place of resurrection and sonship before God. And what a wonderful place is this! To think that now, even while we are in this world, our Lord would have us to know that we are sons, in and through Him, before our God, and that we are instinct with resurrection-life — "alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord;" that we stand before God without a single charge or condemnation, and this, because He had taken by grace the "same condemnation" with the guilty on the cross. He was the "holy thing" — we unholy, altogether undone. But on the cross He was made sin for us, and entered the same condemnation — made it His own on the cross; and now there is none for me. I am brought into the same place that He had as the risen one before God. Of course I am not speaking now of His divine glory. The notion of the creature, no matter how

blest, being in any other position than that of looking up to God and worshipping Him, could not enter a renewed mind. The Lord Jesus was Son in His divine nature from all eternity; but as man, too, He was Son; and also as risen from the dead. And by His death and resurrection, He brings us in before God and His Father, having the same position as Himself, so far as to be sons, absolutely without sin in our new nature, and freed from condemnation before God because the old nature is already judged. The new nature requires none to die for it, but the old did; and all is done. In Christ crucified, God condemned sin in the flesh, and to faith all the evil is gone: The blessedness of Christ is now made ours, and we can look up and say, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” One great mischief that is done to the practical power of Christianity is the putting off the blessing, which the Holy Ghost attaches to us now, till we leave this world and get to heaven.

Suppose you were to tell the great mass of God’s children on the earth, You are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” they would think it rank enthusiasm or mysticism. They are not prepared for such truth, and in general either do not enquire what the verse means, or attenuate it into some mere emotional sentiment. They have no notion that it is a present fact true of all Christians. Though we are not displayed in it yet, it is no question of feeling. May we believe it! Feelings may deceive me, but faith never can. If I see a thing, it is merely my eye that sees. If I believe a truth on God’s word, I am looking at it, in a measure, so to speak, with God’s eyes. The world has a notion that

faith only implies confidence as to a thing which is not sure. This is not the meaning of “I believe” in the things of God. My own vision is a poor range of sight; but what of God’s eye? The believer stands upon the highest ground; he rests upon the certainty of what God says. Happiness, too, is the result; for when you believe, you soon begin to feel. If you believe that God has blotted out your sins, you ere long, if not at once, begin to enjoy it. If I look at myself, I shall always see something wrong. How is this? My sins all gone; and yet, if looking within, I see so much that is painful, loathsome, humiliating. The putting away of sin is not a thing that goes on in my heart, but a mighty work that God wrought in the cross of His beloved Son, on which He calls me to rest, because on it He rests. Am I looking for a sign and token in myself? If so, I shall never have an assurance of it on the right ground. If I think that my sins must be forgiven because I am a changed character (as men speak), can I ever have an hour’s real peace? The result must be, that the more one judges himself, the less happy he will be. What God puts before His children is this — that they should be thoroughly happy in the certainty that their sins are gone, through the blood-shedding of Christ, and yet that they should spare nothing they find within them; judging themselves day by day, because Christ has been judged for them, and God has blotted out their sins, and they cannot endure trifling with that which cost the blood of His Son.

Here, however, the first great thought is that “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” It is not redemption, though of course based upon it. I am here upon the earth, and yet I know that I am blest there

where Christ is at the right hand of God. Not only have I blessings there, but I am blessed “with all spiritual blessings.” The highest blessing God can confer is that which He gives every child of His in heavenly places in Christ. In these few words we gaze at the height of God’s wonderful counsel about us and love for us. He has thus blessed us according to the fulness of His value for Christ.

The expression “heavenly places” is in contrast with the portion of the Jews, who were blessed in earthly places. If we look at Ezekiel 36, it may bring out more distinctly the character of our blessing in contradistinction to theirs. “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean.... And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” Thus, there are spiritual mercies mingled with their blessings; but they will be in the land of their fathers, which God is to make good to the generation to come. It is chiefly learned but unspiritual men who make confusion about these matters. If readers were only simple about Scripture, they would not fall into such mistakes. The prophets says, “Ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers.” Nothing can be plainer than this. He is to bless Israel on the earth — in their soul too, no doubt: but the sphere of this blessing is the holy land. It is His earthly people, not the Church, as we shall see lower down. “I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.” Evidently the blessing is in earthly places. I should not find fault with good men trying to give this a spiritual turn and to preach the gospel from it, provided they did not blot out from it the hopes of Israel by and

by. Primarily the people there are Israel, and they are to be blessed in this manner. We see the land of Palestine now desolate like a wilderness; but “the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose” in that day. There are certain blessings that apply to the believer now, it is true. To the “water” and “Spirit,” in a wonderfully enlarged and deepened scope, our Lord alludes thus in John 3. But I object to the inference that God has abandoned His people, and that this prophecy about the earthly places should be confounded with our heavenly title. The earth and earthly blessings are here dwelt upon by the Spirit of God. Why should we be jealous about the Jews or the earth either? God has shown us such overflowing and surpassing favour that we may well delight and thank Him that the earth is reserved for His ancient nation.

Now if we turn from this — the predicted blessing of Israel upon the earth — to our own proper blessing in Ephesians, how totally different it is! “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” It is God revealing Himself in the fullest manner conceivable. Who was it that knew God pre-eminently? who was the object of God’s love as none had ever been before? If ever there was one who fathomed the full meaning of the words, “My Father,” it was the Lord Jesus. And who but He sounded the depths of “My God?” Yet now, that Blessed One, by redemption and the gift of the Spirit, has capacitated the believer in Him to enjoy the same privilege with Himself. Just in proportion as we receive it with simplicity and judge the old nature (which never enters into it, but only comes as a thick

cloud over our blessing), shall we enter into the realization of our blessing.

Israel's hope is not inward only but outward, in earthly places to be made the most exalted people here below. The scene of our blessing, on the contrary, is in heavenly places, and we are blessed there now in Christ. In a word, a Christian is as one who belongs to the family of the sovereign. There might be reasons of state to make it desirable for the Queen's heir to pass as a stranger through a foreign land, unknown and unregarded. So with the Christian. He is not of the world nor of the age. His body is of the earth, but that which makes him to be what he is, as a son of God, has nothing to do with the present scene or circumstances. He belongs altogether to a glorified Christ. When God begins to deal with Israel, it will be another thing. The attention of the whole world will be directed towards them. There was a time when, even in the midst of all their sin, the people of Israel exercised an enormous influence in the world, spite of their being a small nation and having only a narrow slip of land to dwell on. Their priests and kings gave up the true God, who thereon made them to be the sad evidence of His judgments. But the day is fast coming when they that smote will acknowledge their rejected Messiah, and then will shine the full splendour to which Israel is destined of God. He will crown them with blessing of every kind here below. All the nations of the earth will bow down to Israel; kings and queens will be their nursing fathers and mothers. Christendom, despised as a proud and effete political engine, and more and more degenerating into apostacy, will be set aside like Vashti; God will bless His people of Israel, the Esther of the great King, with all outward blessings in

earthly places, not revealing Himself as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, but as the Lord God, Jehovah, Most High, identified at length with the lowly Jesus of Nazareth.

Is this the way in which we are spoken of here? Not at all. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. A Jew has nowhere in the Old Testament the hope of being blessed in their Messiah. To be joint-heirs with Christ, not only blessed by Christ, but in Christ, is an idea that could not possibly enter the most intelligent Israelite's mind. In a word, their portion will always be under their Messiah, to be ruled by Him as an earthly people. But ours, who believe in Christ now, will be to have the same blessing which God the Father confers upon Christ risen from the dead. What has He done for Christ? He has raised Him up, and put all things under His feet. This glory He will not take alone. He is waiting for His bride — for those who are now being called out of Jews and Gentiles to the knowledge of His name. So that our Lord, while personally exalted, holds it in abeyance because He is waiting for His companions to share it with Him; heirs by His grace, not merely of the fathers, but of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

Nothing can be larger or higher than the blessing spoken of here. Christ will have His heavenly ones above, and His earthly ones below; each fully blest though in different spheres. May I commend the truth brought out in Ephesians 1 to the serious study of God's children? While it becomes us to hear the word of God, it claims from us earnestness of purpose and searching into it as for hidden treasure. We must not expect to be

really and fully blessed through the word of God, unless there be diligence of soul.

We have already seen the twofold title in which God blesses His saints now; in both the form of the blessing being found only in Christ. Had God merely revealed Himself as the God of Abraham or Isaac for instance, He would not ensure a blessing beyond that promised to the fathers. Now He does. Instead of having merely the Jewish blessing before Him, He has Christ in His eye, whom He raised from the dead and set at His own right hand, where He never put David nor any one else. It is a place that belongs to Him in virtue of His personal glory and His suffering unto death. We may sit with Christ on His throne, but this is a very different thing from Christ's sitting at God's right hand. Now it is as the God of the Lord Jesus Christ that He blesses — it is the full blessing that would be suitable to Christ Himself as the object of blessing. Grace puts us as common objects with Christ in order to be blessed by God who blesses after this manner and measure. Nor this only. He is the Father of the Lord Jesus, and as such also He blesses us. So that these two characters, the very highest possible in which to look at God, are those according to which we are blessed. The characters of God, both as God and as Father, as they deal with Christ, issue in a blessing, a commensurate blessing, which He gives to us. Hence there is no limit. He has blessed us "with all spiritual blessings," and moreover too, as we saw, not on the earth, the comparatively lower part of the universe, but in the highest scene of God's power, "in the heavenly places;" and in order to crown and complete all, it is "in Christ;" all is secured in His person.

Verse 4 particularly belongs to the first of these characters in which God has revealed Himself, as verse 5 belongs rather to the second. “According as he hath chosen us in him (that is, in Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” Now it is as the God of Christ that He thus blesses us; not as Father, but as God. In verse 5 it is as Father, because we there read, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself.” The style and character clearly answer to the character of the Father. Special relationship to Him is brought in. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children” — not merely chosen, but — “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Now that language was not used in verse 4. He does not say that He has predestinated us to be holy and without blame before Him in love. Neither does He say that He has called us into this wonderful place according to the good pleasure of His will. And the reason is most manifest. When we hear of the good pleasure of His will, we have language suitable to sovereign special love — that which He displays in order to manifest His own favour. But when we hear of “holy and without blame,” it is God who has chosen us for it: it could not be otherwise. If God would have any brought near Him, and so near as to be in His presence in heaven, if chosen in Christ at all, somehow they must be holy and without blame before Him in love. And all is really of His grace.

The one blessing is from the necessary character of God as God; the other flows from the special relationship into which He enters towards us through our Lord Jesus.

Choosing us is a necessary part, because it is evident there was no one but God to choose. It was before the foundation of the world, when God alone was. Man had no voice nor choice in the matter. It was purely God acting from Himself. It was a matter of God's own choice, that He would have others to be in heaven besides Himself. But if they were to be near Him and before Him, how could they be so with sin upon them? Impossible. How could God sanction souls, even in the most distant part of His dominion, with sin upon them? Still less could it be in heaven, the throne of His Majesty. The day is coming when all evil must be banished into the lake of fire. How then could He tolerate sin in those who are to be brought into the nearest circle of His presence? It was the positive necessity of His character and nature, that if He chooses to have any with Himself in heaven, they must be there "holy and without blame before him." But that is far from being all: it must be "in love," because nothing could be more miserable than that they should not be able to enter into His own affections. Merely to be in the most blessed place of creatures without taint, without anything that could sully the presence of God, would not be enough. Man was made to have a heart, to have affections; and there could not be happiness in creatures, who know what affection is, unless there were that on which affection could rest. If God had such beings brought into His presence, and necessarily without sin in any form, it must be in love also. He will give them a nature not only capable of being before Him without reproach and fear, but also answering to His own love. "We love him because he first loved us." In Christ alone that love is known; but St. John so speaks of God and Christ, that there is great difficulty in deciding which is meant. He

uses “Him” thus, not indiscriminately, but sliding from one into the other. This flows from their oneness: “I and my Father are one,” which is said by John only.

Here we have God’s choice of us personally. For it is not merely to have a people, as if it were some vague thing, a certain number of niches in heaven to be filled up with so many souls. There is no such notion in the Bible. It is persons He chooses. There cannot be such love without a person distinctly before it. And if it is true even among men, that love is not an uncertain feeling — which is rather a fancy, much more is it true with God. He loves us individually. Hence He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to show how entirely it is a choice independent of our character and ways; and if so, it must always flow back to God in a way according to Him. And so it does. If there is this choice of God in Christ before the foundation of the world, He will have saints before Him in such a way as God alone could. He will never have what is unworthy of His love and presence. Hence then it is said, “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” This is not merely holiness, or blamelessness, or love — any or all in part. Hence it does not refer to what we have been. If we examine any person we may find grievous faults in him. Even as a Christian, he is very far indeed from being what is due to God. He is ashamed of himself, grieving over the little his heart responds to the favour God has shown him. And would this suit His presence? Will God be satisfied with that which even a Christian finds fault with? Impossible. The verse looks not at the complex man here, but at what He makes us in Christ, His Son.

In the saint now there is that which is very unsaintly indeed, unlike God and His beloved Son: pride, vanity, foolishness, all kinds of evil ways and thoughts that never flow from Christ, and have no kind of resemblance to Him. But for all this, are they not saints? God forbid they should not be. And yet this is the steady thought of God. He has chosen us in Christ that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. How can that be? The answer is, because God looks at us here according to that which He gives us in Christ, and nothing less. All is ignored in this verse, save that new nature which flows from His grace to the objects of His choice. He has chosen us to be so, and He will have us so perfectly, and nothing else, when the time comes for us to be in His presence. But even now it is true in the essence of the thing, inasmuch as we are in Christ and have His life in us. Can I find any fault in Christ? If Christ is without blame in love, in the very nature of God Himself, He is precisely the life of every Christian, let a man be called by what name he may among men.

But even this is not all. Blessed as it is to answer to the holy character and nature of God — and that is what every saint will do by and by in the glory, and what every saint really possesses as a new creature in Christ now — yet this is not enough. We might be there holy and without blame before Him in love, yet simply as servants. Her Majesty the Queen may surround herself with servants to do her will; she may bring one and another into her presence, and they ought to think themselves greatly honoured by being thus made the ministers of her pleasure, though no family relationship, of course, exists between them. But nothing less than this will do in heavenly things. Such is the wonder of

God’s grace. In the very next verse we have the fact that God is not alone acting from Himself to call us into this wonderful place — to be the reproduction of His own moral nature and character. God is holy and without blame, and He is love in His own nature. This belongs to our life now, and will belong to us altogether when we are brought into heaven, by the power and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, shortly. But it is not as mere servants, but as sons, we shall be there — consciously as sons; not even standing there, like angels, as ministers of His pleasure, but as those who take an interest in all that He is interested in. We shall feel not merely for Him, but with Him. We shall have a common interest with Him — the same kind of feeling, if I may use the same illustration, that members of the royal family have with the crown.

This is what the Holy Ghost brings before us in verse 5. The Christian is planted in Christ before God, and has a holy and a loving nature. But besides this, there is a positive relationship formed; and that relationship, in which we are brought to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is nothing less than being sons according to the pattern of the risen Son of God. As the eternal Son of the Father, none could have such a place with Him. The very thought would be repulsive to a renewed mind; But Christ was pleased to call us His brethren when He rose from the dead and not before. And it is on earth, the place of our sins, where we have been servants of Satan — it is here that through the faith of Christ, we leave behind us all that we were, and enter into this blessed and glorious and most intimate relationship with God. “He hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children.” The word predestinated is a

more special one than “chosen,” which signifies God electing us out of the world. None but an unbeliever could fancy that every one is to be in such a place as this, or that men who have lived in blasphemy against God all their days are to be holy and without blame when they die. God has a choice, and our business is to bless God for His great love — not to judge or find fault with His ways. “Who art thou that replies” against God?” That is the answer of God to all vain thoughts and: reasonings. But then if He chooses according to His nature and holiness, He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself. So that now we find the special privilege and glorious relationship of sons before God in His presence by Jesus Christ. He might not have done it, but it was “according to the good pleasure of his will.”

Not merely He would have, and therefore chose persons; but here is a peculiar display of His pleasure, and therefore He puts them in this blessed place, “to the praise of the glory of his grace wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” Verse 6 shows us that which answers to both the verses before it. The clause, “to the praise of the glory of his grace,” etc., takes in both the choice of verse 4 and the predestination of verse 5 — the character of the choice of God, and the special favour of the predestination of the Father. “To the praise of the glory of his grace wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” “Accepted” is rather a cold word to express what is meant here. It is not what persons doctrinally call acceptance, which is rather more of the nature of reconciliation. But here it seems to me there is the fulness of divine favour, which goes far beyond bare acceptance. In short, God makes us objects of favour

according to all that is in His heart, and, in order that this should be most fully brought out, He says “in the Beloved,” not merely “in Christ.” There was one object that satisfied God, that met every thought, every desire of His heart; and this was Christ, the One beloved, of course, in a sense in which no creature could be so in itself. In order to bless us fully, God has made us the objects of His favour in this Beloved One, and all is “to the praise of the glory of his grace.” This takes in all the heights and depths of His grace who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, blessing us in Christ. In fact, He could not go farther. Could He show favour to any one so much as to Christ? Just so He loves and blesses us. He could not do more, and He will not do less. He has risen up to the fullest character of love and blessing in the grace wherewith He regards us in the Beloved.

But, then, what was our previous state? Verse 7 says, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” It is only alluded to passingly, but it supposes that we were wretched slaves of Satan. In the same person, in whom we become the objects of such favour, we have redemption. God does not in the least degree forget what our condition was when He thus blessed us. He is aware that we had to be brought out of all we were, for indeed we had nothing but sins. With only the previous verses, there might have been the idea that such blessedness and glory could not have been mixed with such as we were. But we have redemption, we are told, in Christ. Still, he never touches on redemption and forgiveness of sins till he has brought us into the height and depth of all privilege flowing from God Himself: so

entirely is all question here of what man is out of sight, that we only, as it were, incidentally get hold of the sad truth of his condition. It might not have been known from the first few verses, that persons so blessed had ever been guilty of a single sin. But here we find that they needed to be redeemed, to have their sins forgiven; and the same Christ, in and through whom we have all our other blessings, is He in whom also we have "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

It may be noticed here, that there is a difference between "the glory" and "the riches" of His grace. "The glory of his grace" takes in all these privileges referred to before. The Holy Ghost has brought out in the seventh verse the riches of His grace — the means and provisions for us as poor sinners. But this would not suffice for God, if He is acting so as to show, not merely His rich resources in dealing with the most wretched individuals, but the glory of His grace. He would display His own character — what He is, and not merely provide for what we were. The praise of the glory of His grace flows from what God feels, and in consequence will do, in order to manifest Himself for us.

Observe, moreover, before we have done with this, that later on we have another redemption, that "of the purchased possession," and a very different thing. We have redemption as far as the forgiveness of sins is concerned: we are waiting for redemption as concerns the inheritance, which depends on the coming of Christ in order to take it actually under His government. The purchased possession has to do with the inheritance, not merely with what affects our souls. As for the soul, we have redemption now as completely as we ever can have

it; which we do well to bear in mind. The believer cannot be more forgiven than now, nor could God do more to put away sin than He has done already. He has given His Son, and the blood of His Son is shed, and it is impossible that God Himself could do more to blot out sin from before His face. What a comfort for our souls! If we think of our sins, we may also enter into the comfortable assurance that all our guilt is gone from before God. We may fall into sin, for it does exist; but it remains a source of self-judgment, instead of a fearful looking for of judgment by and by.

There is just the real difference. As a matter of divine judgment, sin is gone in Christ; as a matter of self-judgment, it is always to be confessed if we slip into it. Nor is self-judgment ever thorough until we know that God's judgment of sin is ended for us on the cross. Under the Old Testament there was no such self-judgment because of sin, as there ought to be under the New. We find, accordingly, that although God never did or could treat any sin with indifference, yet is it often left without a word of comment. But this is not light dealing: God lets the thing speak for itself. He exercises so much the more the hearts of His children. If they are in a wilful state, they may use the record of sin to make light of their own evil ways; otherwise conscience is brought into exercise. It is not until the full condition of man comes out in the cross of Christ, that we see what God's judgment of sin is. Since then we first hear of "the flesh" in the sense in which the New Testament speaks of it. You may find the expression in the Old Testament, but it never wears the same strong, determined, full character of wickedness as it does in the New. It had not yet proved itself, and God always waits till a person or

thing proves its real character, before He pronounces judgment. And we ought to learn from God as to this. The patience of God in judgment is one of the most marvellous of His ways; and we ought to be as to this imitators of God. He awaited the cross of His Son before the true character of man's iniquity was fully brought out. Under the Old Testament we read of things borne with because of the hardness of men's hearts; but in the New Testament there is a different measure, and no evil tolerated for a moment. The mind of God is pronounced upon evil: the darkness is passing, the true light now shines. There is no hiding either of God or man. All is out. Man is lost. God is known not merely as a lawgiver, but as a Saviour-God; and if I do not know Him thus, I do not know Him at all. "This is life eternal: to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

From all this we learn that the final character of evil has only now come out. The Old Testament commanded that evil should not be done; but, as we shall see in the next chapter, the full issue of the trial comes out here: and what is the verdict? That man is dead — morally, spiritually — dead in trespasses and sins. God perfectly understood the character of man before, but He wants us to understand it. We needed redemption, and we have it — forgiveness, and we have it. But we are waiting to have the redemption of the purchased possession This takes in the whole creation of God, including; perhaps, our bodies too, as a part of the creation of God. But the redemption of verse 7 is a closer thing, and we are put in a position now of thoroughly judging ourselves, because we know that we shall not be condemned with the world. God puts us thus into a common interest with

Himself; puts us on His own side, to take His part against ourselves. And this is what repentance means, and therefore it is called repentance towards God.

But the next verse opens up another subject: “Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.” It is not said, “abounded toward us in forgiving us,” because full forgiveness is a positive need. But when we hear of “wisdom and prudence,” it is a question of God’s counsels about His Son, over and independent of all thought of necessities. He says, as it were, You are able now to enter into My thoughts, and understand them when I speak. You are delivered from anxiety about your sins, and are free now to enter into My purpose. “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.” And this secret of His will is, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance.” (Ver. 9-11.) We have clearly here, in these central verses, the fact that we are capacitated (the question of sin being settled in our souls) to hear what God has to say to us about all other things. He has not now merely to tell us what He is going to do upon the earth, as He dealt with Abraham. The relationship is higher than that which was made known to the patriarchs. At the beginning, when the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, He brought them to Adam, the lord of creation, to see what he would call them; and whatsoever he called each living creature, that became its name. “And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field.” (Gen.

2:19, 20.) This was conferred wisdom in the domain of nature. But now it is far more profound and comprehensive; for it is a question of the supremacy of the second Man and of the discernment which suffices for and suits its boundless heights and depths. Accordingly, God has made His grace to abound towards us in every sort of wisdom and intelligence. Whatever displays His character and Christ's glory, He makes known to us. He treats us, not as servants, but as friends. He has one thing nearer than aught else — what He is going to do for His Son: and He imparts to us the secrets nearest to His own heart.

If any person say, I do not want to understand mysteries, I answer, You do not want to know what God wishes to teach you. Unbelief always shows itself in some character of hostility to God. He, in His perfect goodness, gives the comfort of salvation, and then opens out these other truths. "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will." This does not mean something you cannot understand, but what you could not know before God told you. Do not turn away and say, All I want to know is to be saved. We ought to desire to learn all God deigns to teach us. The word "mystery" means what God was pleased to keep secret — something He had not before revealed, but quite intelligible when it is unfolded. "Mystery," in a popular sense, is totally different from its use in the word of God. There are many things very wonderful in the prophecies, but they are not called mysteries. Brought out now for the first time, it is the mystery of His will. There are many mysteries explained in the New Testament as those of the kingdom of heaven. Babylon, too, is called a mystery. The mystery here is, that God means to unite all things

in heaven and in earth, under the headship of our Lord. He does not mean to have the heavens, as they are now, completely severed from the earth, but to have a united system of heavenly and earthly glory, all under Christ — this is the mystery of His will.

But there is more than this. He means that we should share the glory along with Christ. Thus there are two great parts in the mystery of His will. The first is Christ, and the second is the Church: and therefore it is said in this very Epistle, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” It is not “the Church,” of course, that is the mystery, but “Christ and the Church.” The Church, however blessed, is but a subordinate part of it. That she is so at all is solely because she belongs to Christ, the heavenly Head of all things. God’s purpose is for “the dispensation of the fulness of times.” Then the hours of shame and sorrow that are now running on will have exhausted their course — the time of the creature’s subjection to vanity, the time for Israel to be blinded judicially, the time for the Gentiles to rule as if God neither intervened nor noticed, the time when the Church of God lies in weakness and broken, the time of Satan’s liberty to deceive and torment men. These things are now going on — man, the chief, through sin, subject to sickness and death, and all creation groaning. But God Himself will put an end to everything of the sort. He means to bind Satan and deliver man from his seduction. He will have Israel blessed and united under their Messiah — the Gentiles blessing God, who will be sanctified among them — the earth itself no longer the poor, groaning, miserable scene that it is, but the curse removed, and the wilderness rejoicing and blossoming as the rose. All

these things God will yet accomplish; and when the suitable times according to God are complete (πληρ τ. κ.),1 He will change all, bringing forth Christ as the Head, centre, and means of every blessing. Christ is the stronger man that is to bind the strong, the bruiser of the serpent's head — the Lord of heaven and earth — the Messiah of Israel, and Son of man ruling supremely over all nations. All these things are to be accomplished most simply and efficaciously, but not by the power of man — not even by the spread of the gospel. Christ in person will administer and uphold the glory of God in the universe.

If men had a just sense of the present state of the Church, they would put on sackcloth and ashes instead of blowing their trumpet. What we have to do is to humble ourselves before God, because of what we are and see around us, even in the best. It requires a great deal of patience not only to bear, and be borne with, but to go on in love. If we really have a heart for God and for His children, we shall feel these things deeply, and shall seek the blessing of those who are led away by it — yea, thoroughly and heartily — remembering that the blessed day is at hand when Christ will be exalted as the Head of all things, heavenly and earthly. While it becomes us to chasten ourselves, we need not be disheartened. We know that our hope is one that maketh not ashamed. It is not founded upon what the Church or any society is going to do, for our hope is Christ. We know that God has made known unto us the secret of His will. Where there is not an exercised conscience, this truth may not be rejected; but it is not realized nor applied in such a state. God's blessed cure for the world's disorder is Christ brought out from His present hidden position;

and the moment that He is so, what a change! All things in heaven and earth will be united in Christ; and when that day comes, we shall enter visibly on our inheritance. We have the title already, but are not in manifest possession. “In whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; that we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ.”

We have, first of all, (verse 5) our predestination as children. “And if children then heirs” — heirs of a glorious inheritance, Christ being made the head of the universe. (Ver. 10, 11.) The prevalent interpretation is to apply verse 10 to Christ’s position now. They imagine that “the fulness of times” here means the same thing as in Galatians 4. But “the fulness of the times” differs widely from “the fulness of time,” which last means the space which closed with the incarnation of Christ, or was completed by it. Christ’s birth is a very different thing from Christ’s exaltation, as the head of all. Deadly error is at work when men put the Son’s incarnation in the place of redemption. Our union with Christ is made to depend upon His bare incarnation, not upon His being risen from the dead and entering upon His headship thus. But if our union with Christ be confounded with His being a man, He unites Himself with human nature, and there is no special union between the Christian and Christ, because humanity belongs to the whole race, i.e., to man in sin. This naturally leads to the further heresy of making Christ take up humanity in its fallen condition.

It is said, again, “That we should be to the praise of his glory, we who first trusted in Christ.” The allusion is,

before the Jews (of whom it specially speaks) behold Christ in the appointed time and way. “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.” Now, he says, we are those who have fore-hoped in Christ. Our hope was founded upon Christ before He is seen and believed in by the rest of the nation. The “we” in verse 12 does not go beyond believing Jews. “In whom ye also” is in contradistinction. The “we” and the “ye” refer, the one to Paul and his fellow-believers out of Israel, the other to believing Gentiles, such as the Ephesians. If this be so, the meaning is “that we [Christian Jews] should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ.” The nation of Israel will not be fore-hopers “to the praise of His glory.” They will be the subjects of His glory. “Arise, shine, for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” His glory will embrace their salvation; but to “the praise of His glory” it will be that there are those out of that unbelieving nation who received Christ before they saw Him, and who consequently will appear with Him in glory. Blessed are they who receive Christ when they behold Him; but still more blessed those who, though they have not seen Him, yet have believed! (John 20)

We have thus seen that the apostle, in verse 12, introduces the believing Jews as now brought into all the blessings spoken of in the previous portion. Then, addressing the Gentile saints at Ephesus, he says, “In whom ye also having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

It may be profitable, here, to enter into a further development of the Holy Ghost’s presence and action. Men soon departed far from the truth of God. Before the

three last centuries we know that a thick cloud of darkness hung over Christendom. But even since the light that shone at the Reformation, Christians have been struggling to realize in their own souls that they were born of God and justified in Christ. One fully admits the immense importance that a soul should be thoroughly established. But were regeneration and justification intended to be the sum and substance of the Christian's research, efforts, and desires? On the contrary, are they more than the very threshold, or, at most, the foundation on which a Christian has to build? Does not God look for it, that, being born again, instead of occupying ourselves with continual searching after signs and tokens that we are so, we should be making progress in Christ? To be born again is the first essential work of the Spirit of God, without which there is no life towards God, no possibility of advance in the things of God. It is the universal want, the indispensable condition in order to any soul's having part in the blessing of God at any time and in all dispensations.

Hence, when Nicodemus came to our Lord, wishing to be taught of Him, our Lord at once begins there. The Rabbi owned that Jesus was a teacher come from God, by whom he wanted to be taught. But our Lord stops him in a peculiarly solemn manner: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, astonished, asked how such a thing could be? Our Lord, however, meets his unintelligent question with a re-assertion, only in still stronger terms: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." There we have clearly the explanation of what it is to be born again. It is to be born of water and of the Spirit. Nicodemus still

expresses his amazement at this; that a Jew, a moral, religious Jew, who was no heathen, who had the law, and seemed to have been peculiarly honoured of God, should need to be born afresh; that he himself, a master in Israel in a pre-eminent sense, should thus be met by what was really a rebuke, to him, that pressed the necessity of a vital change which, so far from having realized, he did not even think to be necessary! This was indeed a blow that arrested Nicodemus at the very start. Our Lord, however, shows that he ought to have known these things (i.e., of course, from the prophets). Mark this, because it is a thoroughly satisfactory answer to those who wish to connect the being born of water with baptism. He who is acquainted with the views here taught, cannot fairly think that there is any depreciation of that institution of Christ. For I hold, that nobody ought to be owned on christian ground till he is baptized with water. I do not mean that he may not be a believer; but if he have not submitted to baptism in the name of the Lord, he is not yet ostensibly off Jewish or Pagan ground. And our Lord elsewhere insisted on the necessity of being baptized as well as believing. (Mark 16)

But important as baptism may be as the appointed sign of death and resurrection in Christ, yet our Lord did not directly refer to the rite with Nicodemus. For He says — not, Art thou a disciple of Christ, but — “Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?” That is, as a Jew he ought to have known this. How could he know christian baptism as a Jew? To such an one this was a novelty; it did not even exist at the time. How could that be known which was not yet brought out? He ought to have known what was meant by being born of

water and of the Spirit, and to have felt the absolute necessity of it. What then was meant? This: that no matter where, when, or who, everyone who should see or enter the kingdom of God must be born of water and of the Spirit, must have the Holy Ghost communicating a new life to him. And how is that life produced? By an ordinance? No. By christian walk? No. By what means, then? By prayer? Nay; but by the reception of God's Word revealing Christ. Therefore it is written, that we are born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." With the testimony of Peter there is that of James also: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." The instrument employed for God's begetting us, is "the word of truth." So that water is clearly used in this passage in John 3 as figurative of the word of God applied by the Spirit. The two are joined together that it should not be supposed it is merely an ordinance or the word, but the Spirit applying God's word with quickening power to the soul. Therefore, when speaking about believing, it is said, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" It is necessary the Word should be preached. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Compare also 1 Cor. 4:15. It is no matter what positive passage of Scripture you take up, all teach the same thing. Our Lord insists that every one who enters the kingdom must enter by that door. What, then, is to become of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Some may say that circumcision is equivalent; but do not believe the dream for a moment: if so, what would become of so many before or outside both circumcision and baptism? All these explanations are mere clumsy guesses at

Scripture. Even if there were no real difference between baptism and circumcision, when our Lord lays down the new birth He refers to neither. He does not insist on a rite with such large exceptions, but an absolute and universal spiritual necessity. He is not speaking of the comparatively modern rite of baptism — of that which, as it came late into the world, will not always abide in it. For there is no ground, that I know, to suppose that during the millennium baptizing people with water will proceed. It is a rite peculiar to the time, at least, between the two advents — baptism into Christ's death.

But John 3 speaks of what every person must pass through without qualification or exception, if he is to see and enter the kingdom of God — what was as true of the thief upon the cross as of Saul of Tarsus. All children of God, past, present, or future, are born again; all have this new life given to them. There is the communication of divine life to them. But as far as regards those who hear the word, it is plainly through the Holy Ghost using the word as a means of life. It is emphatically the representation of Christ. In John 4 we enter on another operation of the Holy Ghost. "If thou knewest the free-giving of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The living water is plainly the Holy Ghost, whom Christ gives. Here it is not the quickening operation of the Spirit, indispensable for all times and under all circumstances, if any souls are to belong to God; but it is a special privilege that Christ bestows personally. And you will find in the discourse of our Lord which follows, and is connected with what He had said to the woman of Samaria, that the Holy Ghost is given to believers now as the means of worshipping

their God and Father in spirit and in truth. Thus we have in John 4 a totally different operation of the Spirit from what was urged in John 3. And to whom did our Lord disclose this? To a poor, wretched, abandoned woman; not even a Jewess, but a Samaritan. Our Lord is there showing the grace that goes out to the very vilest. God was now no longer, as before, putting the law forward. He displays Himself as a giver. Under the law God is rather a receiver; He asks, demands, insists that the creature render Him the honour due to His Majesty. In the gospel, God is the giver of His own Son. Instead of seeking something from guilty, lost man, He confers His very best on one who did not at first ask Him. “If thou knewest the gift — the free-giving — of God, (what a new sound to the Samaritan!) thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” This is what He does — He is giving the Spirit, the power of eternal life. The consequence of this most precious opening out of the truth is, that we know the Holy Ghost to be in us as the spring of communion and power of worship. It is not so much as using the word of God to deal with us in our natural uncleanness and to communicate a new life which cleaves to God and hates sin, with new feelings, new desires, new wants, which are only answered in Christ, and which every regenerate soul must have, if it were a poor nun, or a superstitious priest going through the mass. Yet if one were born of God, he could not but have a yearning after what he had not, and find, in the long run, Christ the object that attracted his soul — Christ the contrast of all that was found on earth or anywhere — Christ the only One that suited him, and the One, too, whose glory it was so to bless him. Of what would this be the proof? That he was born of God. For there is no proof but what may turn out

a delusion save this — that my wants turn me to Christ, and make me find in Him the only One that can satisfy the soul.

But in John 4 it is not the case of a proud ruler of the Pharisees who is made to feel the need of regeneration, but a depraved woman, that had lost her character, to whom no one would care to speak, except — wonderful to say — the Son of God! It is to her that the Lord brings out this great truth, the gift of the Spirit: no longer merely acting morally on the soul or quickening, but Himself dwelling in the heart, the Holy Ghost the power of divine fellowship and worship. What a joy! the Holy Ghost dwelling in believers, the Father seeking such to worship Him. Do you know this? Or are you still tramelled by what is now passed, what once existed and then had the sanction of God? by the role of a past dispensation for an earthly people? by rites which no longer have the slightest value in His sight who reveals Himself as Father? The day of forms and ceremonies is entirely gone. How often people say, We do not attach importance to such things! The truth is, that they are now a very bad thing, and contrary to God’s actual order. It is not only that fine sights and sounds should not be an object in worship, but it is a positive sin to seek or admit them. It is, in principle, a going back to idolatry and a condemned world. Therefore, in John 4, our Lord brings in, “The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” There is the truth enunciated about worship. At Jerusalem the splendour of ceremonials had been at its height; but now all this is over, and any one fighting for it now unwittingly rebels against Christ. Our Lord shows that it is no longer in that mountain nor at

Jerusalem that God should be worshipped. There was just about to dawn a new condition of things. And what does God value now? The true worshippers adoring the Father in spirit and in truth. What are they? His children. “The Father seeketh such to worship him.” He is gathering children, forming them for His own praise, putting the Holy Ghost within them to give the consciousness of their relationship with Himself, and, having this, to draw near to Him as their God and Father.

It is plain, then, that the notion now of having a mixed worship of people, some converted and some not, is a direct contradiction of Christianity. It could not be otherwise before the cross. There was then no such thing as God separating His children from those that were not thus related to Him. It would have been a sin for a believing Israelite to have said to an unbeliever, I cannot worship with you, because you are not born of God. But now the sin is to join in God’s worship with those who are not His children; and for this simple reason, that the Father is seeking true worshippers, and none but such, to worship Him. I do not mean that it is a sin for those not converted to be in the same place as spectators and hearers. But the attempt to join everybody in the worship of God is a fatal delusion, dishonouring to Himself and destructive to the souls of those that are not true worshippers. But people have not faith to stand separate from the world. They like to have the countenance of men; and, of course, it is trying to have to act decidedly. We are warned of God that, if we seek to please men, we should not be the servants of Christ. We must run the risk of paining them, but faithful are the wounds of a friend. Some confound hearing the

gospel or other truth with worship. But they are totally different. In worshipping God, Christians offer up to God services of praise and thanksgiving. Worship is what goes from the believer to God; whereas, in the gospel or other ministry, it is a message coming down from God for the good of souls, for the instruction of believers, or for the conviction and salvation of unbelievers. But whether one or other be addressed, it is always that which comes from God to them, and not what goes from them to God; so that the confounding of these two things is a serious evil. Among many the thing which makes them attached to the old walls and routine is not the prayers, but because they hope to hear something good in the sermon. They entirely thus pass out of the condition of worshippers. Worship is the true expression of the heart's praise and thanks by the Holy Ghost, whether by an illiterate man or not. We know in the case of the apostles that they could not speak correctly (Acts 4); but, for all that, they were the chosen vessels of such a power of God as never visited this earth before or since, in men of like passions with ourselves. And I believe it is so still and always will be so. God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty Although there may be a Paul brought in occasionally, this is the exception, and God never intends that the exceptions should become the role.

Thus, beside regeneration, which is the first operation of the Spirit of God, there is the further gift of the Holy Ghost. "In whom ye also.... after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." They were born of water and of the Spirit. They heard the word of truth, which we find in this very epistle set forth under the figure of water — "that he might sanctify and cleanse it

with the washing of water by the word." (Eph. 5:26.) It is not only that the Church is washed by the word, but the poor sinner is born of the word when he believes the gospel — born of water and of the Spirit. But was it merely that they were born of water and of the Spirit? "In whom also, after that ye believed (or having believed), ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." It is very startling to many to find that, after they have been born of the Spirit, there is such a thing as being sealed by the Spirit. Others, again, seeing both facts, invented confirmation. They felt from the Scripture that there is something over and above being born of water. Therefore a religion of forms first made baptism to regenerate every one, and then confirmation to crown it. But forms are no better than idolatry: it is putting something in the place of Christ. After the apostles left, this grew apace. Ceremonies, done by the hand of men, were substituted for the power of the Holy Ghost acting on the souls of men. Finding from the word of God that there were these two things, regeneration first and then the subsequent gift of the Holy Ghost, they adopted two different ceremonies — in one sense very properly, if there must be a religion of forms at all. But it is a total mistake as to the very nature of Christianity.

Yet the truth remains that there were two different operations of the Holy Ghost. The first is, when a man is brought to a sense of sin. What makes a man abhor himself? He is born of God. He has no happiness at all perhaps, but a real sense of ruin; yet his heart cleaves to God. That man is born of God — truly converted: no comfort as yet perhaps in his soul, but his heart is open to listen further to the word of the truth, the gospel of

salvation. He believes it. What then? He is sealed of the Holy Ghost, as a believer, not only in Christ, but in the gospel of our salvation — the work that Christ has done. For I do not think that you can have a soul sealed with the Holy Ghost, unless he enters into the work as well as the person of Christ. This accounts for the fact that there were persons born of the Holy Ghost who never were sealed. For instance, the Old Testament saints were believers in Christ; they all looked for Christ. All were born of God, but not one was sealed with the Holy Ghost. To be born of the Spirit and sealed with the Spirit are very different things, which may or may not be united in the same person. All must be born of the Spirit, but it is never said that all must be sealed with the Spirit in order to enter into the kingdom of God. Wherever the Holy Ghost speaks of the sealing of the Spirit, it proves the clean contrary. Who was the first person said to be sealed with the Spirit? Our blessed Lord Himself. He had it in a way peculiar to Himself. When was He sealed? When redemption was accomplished and He went up to heaven? No; but when He walked upon earth. “Him hath God the Father sealed.” It was as Son of man He was sealed, and as Son of man on earth before redemption — without bloodshedding, because He knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. He was absolutely sinless: He could have the Holy Ghost abiding on Him entirely apart from blood, because He was the Holy One — the Saviour. He needed no work — no blood — no redemption; but yet He died, and there was blood shed and redemption effected. Why so? That we might be sealed — that we, who had no natural title to be brought nigh, that we, in whom the Holy Ghost could never take up His abode, might have that same Holy Ghost who dwelt in Him abiding in us.

This is what our Lord gradually brings out to view. “Thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” Therefore it was that the Lord taught the disciples to ask for the Holy Spirit; and this, after they were already regenerate. Yet He tells them to ask the Father for the Holy Spirit. (Luke 11) Is it the same thing now, seeing that He has given the Spirit? Am I to ask for the Holy Ghost when I have Him dwelling in me? It would have been the most flagrant unbelief, after Christ was in the midst of the disciples, had they asked God to send Christ. And now, when the Holy Ghost is sent from heaven, and given to be in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life, was it for such to entreat the Holy Ghost to be given them? for Christians to be praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit? It is a practical denial that the Holy Ghost is sent down from heaven, and is dwelling in us. It is quite right to pray that we may not grieve Him, and that we may not quench Him. To pray that we may be strengthened with all might according to His Spirit in the inner man, is according to the word of God; but we ought not to say one word that implies the Holy Ghost is not here when He is. A most grievous cloud of darkness rests on the minds of many children of God as to this subject. They do not believe their privileges, they do not know that the Holy Ghost dwells in them. Does not the Holy Ghost feel this? If you had one caring for you day by day, and you were habitually to question your relationship to him, or doubt his care of you, it would show that you were morbid. There is a mist over your eyes, and you are asking for the very mercies that are already given. This is neither wisdom nor faith. It is quite true that we may ask God to bless the gospel to the unconverted and to regenerate them. But people pray for a pouring out of

the Spirit — a different thing from conversion, and only mentioned in connection with the Holy Ghost's being given, first to the Jews, next to the Samaritans, and, thirdly, to the Gentiles. From that day to this, there is not the smallest ground to ask God for an out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. It is an unintelligent prayer, founded on unbelief of the truth that the Holy Ghost is sent down. Even God Himself could not add to the blessedness of the gift He has already given. There was a great difference between a Jew, a Gentile, and a Samaritan; and therefore it is mentioned expressly in relation to the three. The Holy Ghost never will be poured out again upon the Church. It is ignorance of the ways of God to look for it. He has been poured out for the Church as truly as it is possible for God to give. But when the heavenly saints have been taken to be with Christ at His coming, there will in due time follow an outpouring of His Spirit on a new people, when the Jews and Gentiles will be brought as such distinctly to the knowledge of Jesus. But as long as the Church is on the earth, there never will nor can be such a thing. Can it be repeated, any more than there can be another mission of the Lord Jesus to work again for us? Nor is this a mere matter of speculation. It is connected in the deepest possible way with our worship and even our peace.

You will find that faith in the presence of God's Spirit, or unbelief of it, is that which puts to the test saints in the present day. It behoves us to consider well whether we really do enter into the mind of God about it. Let us understand that what constitutes us Christians is not only that we believe in Christ, but that we are now sealed with the Holy Ghost. He regenerates an unbeliever by faith in Christ; He seals none but

believers. This was the decisive proof of man's being a Christian. Peter thus alleges the fact: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" It was not merely that they had believed; but God had given them the Holy Ghost, and could they dare to refuse persons in whom that divine Person dwelt, on whom God had conferred such signal grace? Such, too, is the ground of all christian unity — the presence of the Holy Ghost. The question is not merely, Is there life? but, Have we believed that the Holy Ghost dwells in you? It was the possession of the Spirit, and not life merely, that was made the turning point. It was not until they had received the Holy Ghost that the Gentiles were acknowledged as part and parcel of the Church of God. (Acts 11) The Church is not only bound to look for life, and to believe that there is life in the soul, but is also authorized from the word of God to wait till there is such a manifestation of it, as to plainly manifest that the man has the Holy Ghost dwelling in him. There never was such a thing as owning as an assembly till there was a recognition of their being on common ground with the Church by the reception of the Holy Ghost.

All this makes the true way of dealing with saints now very evident. The Church would be justified in expecting this manifestation of the power of the Spirit. It is not true charity which does not look for it. "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." Without dwelling on this last verse, I would make the remark again, that as the seal of the Spirit could not be till the

work of Christ was done (the Son only being sealed upon earth who needed no redemption, but who came, on the contrary, to redeem us to God), as we now, on the footing of redemption, receive the Holy Ghost to dwell in us, so we receive the earnest of the inheritance.

This last, I believe, to be just as peculiar to the Church of God since Pentecost, as the sealing of the Spirit. As the disciples were not sealed with the Spirit, so neither had they the earnest of the inheritance till the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven. This earnest is the power of the Holy Ghost giving a believer now present joy, present anticipation of the glory to which he is going. This may be hindered in many a believer's heart by a want of knowledge of the truth, or by the workings of the flesh, worldliness, etc. But still it remains true, that, now that the Holy Ghost is given, a believer ought to look up and pray to God if there be anything that hinders his entering into the joy of his blessed inheritance, that it may be detected and put away. I am quite sure that the caring only for being born of God has acted greatly to the injury of the children of God; it has stopped them short, as if the only object were to learn that they were children and no more. But our business is, having believed, to go on and learn other truths, and above all, Christ Himself. So it is precisely that the Holy Ghost's regenerating a soul is not to arrest the soul with the fact that it is regenerate; but being born of God, we have to go forward, to enter into the blessed truths of God, which cluster round both our redemption and our future glory, and find their centre in Christ's person and work.

As the seal, the Holy Ghost is the witness of the perfectness of our being cleansed from our sins — the

effect of the work of Christ. That operation of the Spirit is meant which supposes the work done, and that we are set apart to God on the ground of redemption. We are sealed because redemption is finished. If I look at glory, it is not arrived. Therefore the figure is changed when he speaks of our inheritance. “Sealing” would not do in connection with that, because we have it not as a fact; we wait to be put in possession of what we are to have along with Christ. Hence the Holy Ghost is spoken of as “the earnest of our inheritance.” The same Spirit who seals us is the earnest of our bright future “till the redemption of the purchased possession.” First of all, we have the privileges of divine grace that chose us in Christ; predestined us to the place of sons; took us into full favour, without a single question, “in the Beloved;” gave us redemption already in Christ through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. But no sooner has the Holy Ghost thus established us in the full knowledge of God’s love to us, and the present effect of it in putting away our sins, than He brings before us the inheritance. Hence comes in the relation of the Holy Ghost to these two things. And as there are two great parts in God’s choice of us personally, so the Holy Ghost takes a double relationship. He is the seal of the grace and blessing that we have in Christ, and He is the earnest of the glory we are going to have with Christ. These are the relations of the Holy Ghost to the individual believer. All the corporate dealings of the Spirit have a secondary place compared with His ways with the soul individually, which, though susceptible of a far fuller development, have received a measure of notice sufficient for my present purpose.

We have now the Holy Ghost leading the apostle into a remarkable prayer flowing out of the subject (or, at least, a part of it) already brought before us. It will be found that all is in the most orderly connection which it is possible to conceive, even when revealed to us; an order that we never could have conceived, unless God had made it known, but which, once communicated, approves itself immediately to the spiritual judgment. For the blessing which the enraptured apostle had poured out in the earlier verses flows, we have seen, from a twofold title of God: “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Accordingly in this epistle there are two prayers, answering to this double title. The first prayer is given in the portion now before us, and pertains to His title as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ; while in Ephesians 3:14, we have a corresponding prayer, which answers to the second title, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both, clearly, have Christ as the foundation and centre; but, then, Christ regarded in a wholly different point of view. In the former of the two, Christ is viewed as man, and one who calls God His God; in the second of them, Christ is regarded in His still more intimate relationship as Son, who therefore brings before us the Father. We, too, have communion with God in both respects; we have to do with Him as God and as Father. It is said in John 4, “The hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” But then our Lord adds, “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” There is an immense difference between the two things. As the Father He is seeking worshippers, communicating the unspeakable favour of bringing them

to the knowledge of His love. He forms their hearts after the display of Himself in Christ, causes them to overflow with thanksgiving and praise, and thus constitutes them worshippers in spirit and in truth. But then it is added, that God is a spirit, etc. Whatever the form in which He might have manifested Himself in Judaism, for special reasons — whatever displays of His judicial majesty, in tangible ways, Himself properly hidden, He is a spirit, and consequently He must have spiritual worship. Thus it is not merely the exceeding love that is seeking and making and gathering out worshippers, but it is the necessary character of the only worship that He admits now. From the moment that He reveals Himself fully, He can own nothing but real worship in the Spirit. The day of forms, rites, and ceremonies is totally passed. Hence it is not only that He does not look for them, but He scorns them; He treats them as a libel upon His nature, a slight on His Son, and Satan's substitute for the power of the Holy Ghost. They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. I think it important to bring out the connections of the blessed word of God so as to show that the distinction pointed out is not imaginative. Alas! that men should be beguiled to invent, in presence of the untold treasures of the Bible. All we have to do is to bow before what is given us there. We may have, no doubt, to learn; but where the truth is known, what a mercy to be entirely delivered from the vain desire or the need of any invention! It is natural to unsatisfied man to seek out exciting novelties. But God is infinitely above man, and His word rich beyond all thought; so that all we have to do is to submit our souls to Scripture, assured, too, that the revelation of God, old as it is, offers practically that which is ever new to the heart.

In our epistle, then, we have these two prayers; the first of them introduced by the apostle, who says, “wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints.” Now inasmuch as our love would bring in the thought of something on man’s part that would give importance to us, although he is about to speak of love to the saints, he introduces the matter by “faith,” because this throws us not so much on our love to Him as His love to us. “Wherefore,” he says, “I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus,” and then gives the consequence of this, “and your love unto all the saints.” This is a very important word in judging of our love. We are all apt to form a circle even among the saints of God — to have those that we prefer, those that suit us best, whose thoughts, feelings, habits, are more or less the same as our own, or, at least, are no great trial to us. But, then, this is not love to the saints. There is more love to ourselves in it than loving them. The flesh likes what is agreeable to us — what does not cause us pain, what is, perhaps, a gratification to the amiabilities of nature. All that may be where there is really no exercise of the new nature, no mighty power of the Spirit of God working in our hearts. We have always to test our souls, and ask how we stand in this. Is the prominent motive and objects of our hearts the Lord Jesus? Is it with Him and for Him that we think of and feel towards all the saints?

I fully admit that love towards the saints cannot, and ought not, to take the same shape towards all. It must be in the energy and intelligence of the Spirit, varied according to the call upon love. While one ought to love even a person who is under discipline, it would be a very great mistake to suppose that your love must be shown

in the same way as if he were not. You do not cease to love him; indeed you never are in a position and spirit to exercise discipline with the Lord where there is not love — righteous hatred of the sin, indignation it may be, but real charity to the person. It would be better to wait upon God if it be not so in our hearts, till we can take it up in the spirit of divine grace. There must be, of course, a dealing in righteousness; but even in dealing with one's child there ought not to be such a thing as chastening it in a passion. Anything that merely arises out of a sudden impulse, is not a feeling that glorifies God about evil. Therefore, in cases of discipline, there ought to be self-: judgment, and great patience, too, unless it be something so flagrant that to hesitate about it would be culpable weakness, or want of decision and jealousy for God, for there are some sins so offensive to God and to man that they ought, if we are sensitive to His holiness and obedient, to be met with grave energy and as it were on the very spot. The arena of the sin, God would have to be the scene of its judgment according to His will.

Supposing something done in the public assembly, false doctrine in the midst of God's people, if there were the power of God, and a heart for His rights, it might be due to His majesty to deal with it without delay. This is sufficiently plain from the word of God, where in a case of direct hypocrisy and lying against God, we find the promptness of the Holy Ghost, through the apostle, in the very presence of the Church, which at once judged the fraud that was attempted to be practised upon Him who dwelt there. I deny there was want of love in this: rather was it the necessary accompaniment of divine love acting, through the Holy Ghost's might, in the

assembly, or at least, by Peter, as the special instrument of His power therein. It was a stern judgment, doubtless; but it was the fruit of intense desire for the saints of God, and of horror that such a sin should get a footing and shelter among them, and the Holy Ghost should be thus foully dishonoured, and be grieved with the whole Church if it were connived at. But in ordinary cases the same love would wait, and let time be given for the fault to be owned and repented of. In nine cases out of ten mistakes arise from precipitancy, because we are apt to be jealous for our own reputation. O how little have we realized that we are crucified and dead with Christ! We feel the scandal, or something that affects the public mind: this is not the power of the Holy Ghost, but the selfish egoism that is at work in our hearts. We do not like to lose our character, or to share the sorrow and shame of Christ in those who bear His name. Not of course, that one would make light of what is wrong: that never could be right about anything either great or small. We ought never to justify the least wrong, whether in ourselves or in others, but accustom our souls to the habitual clearing of the name of the Lord, even if it be about a hasty word. If we begin to be careless about little offences, there is nothing to preserve us from great sins but the mere mercy of God. If love unto all the saints were working in our hearts, there would be less haste.

We sometimes misconstrue things, and endeavour to give, as we take, a very sombre impression. where evil was but in appearance. Let us beware of judging according to the first blush, where the reality may prove to be otherwise: it is not righteous judgment. We should seek to judge things by a higher standard, and in the

light of God. In these serious matters we are bound to be sure, and never to yield to suspicion. All judgment, if it be according to God, must proceed upon what is known and certain, not upon what is a surmise — too often the effect of an unfounded pretension to superior spirituality. We find the importance of this constantly; and, were our souls more simple about it, fewer mistakes would be made.

Christ has the first place where the heart is true; and next, “all the saints” become the object of our love. If there are two cases of persons in fault, and the one were a prime favourite, and the other but little liked, the latter is in imminent danger, I need hardly say, of going to the wall. My object of aversion would labour under a cloud which obscures the truth, no matter how evident it might be to the dispassionate; whereas, on the contrary, the favourite would derive that which outweighs the proofs of guilt from the unwillingness on the part of his friends to pronounce anything wrong about him. Both these feelings are thoroughly at issue, in such circumstances, with the mind of God. Indeed, both favouritism and prejudices are plainly condemned by His blessed word. “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17)

“Love unto all the saints” is enjoined because they are saints. To love them, because God has separated and brought them into an eternal relationship with Himself, is the only true and christian love to such. Our great difficulty always is that our thoughts, feelings, actions, should flow from this ground. Do not mistake me. I do not mean that it is wrong to have friends. Our Lord had.

He loved John as He did not love the others, and there was a sense in which He loved them every one alike; as His saints, they were beyond comparison precious in His sight. He might prize the faithfulness of some of His servants; He might have to encourage, reprove, correct all round; and we must leave room for all these things. There is the grand basis of love to all the saints; but it is clear we are not bound to open out matters of a personal nature to every one because he is a saint. For example, saints are not always the wisest of men; and while we are not to disown their saintship, we are not bound to lay bare our difficulties, or to seek counsel in what may require ripe spiritual judgment from those who could render no help whatever in the case. Love there must be always. This brings in the value of that divine principle, “esteeming others better than ourselves.” This I hold to be true of all saints. It might be a man that had not two ideas and yet had Christ before his soul. He might be very ignorant and very foolish — hasty perhaps in spirit, strong in prejudice, weak in sympathies, and worthless as a counsellor; but if there is evidently a soul that cleaves to Christ and values Him above everything, can I not, should I not, esteem him better than myself? Do not I see there is that which admonishes my soul — which refreshes and edifies me, much more than if he were merely the staunchest friend and the wisest adviser? In the least saint of God there is that which both cheers and humbles the heart. I am not to esteem a person for a quality which he may not possess: God does not, could not, put such a phantom before us. On the other hand, it is well to bethink ourselves of the preciousness of every saint as such. Show me the very weakest and most trying of them all; yet we may and ought to cultivate a real, genuine respect for them as God’s children. There

is not only God for them, but what is of Christ in them; and this may commend them above all other considerations to him who values communion with the Father and the Son.

On the contrary, in thinking of ourselves, ought we not to feel how much there is that is unlike Christ? May we ever be specially alive to that in which we break down and grieve the Spirit of God! This would have the effect of lowering and putting down our own self-esteem. Could we think so highly of ourselves, if we felt as we ought our exceeding and, alas! frequent failure, in presence of the rich, perfect grace of God to our souls? Whereas, if we had before us in others, not their failure, but Christ's love to and His life in them, and the glory to which they belong, what would be the effect? "Love unto all the saints." It is Christ discerned in the saints, which is the power of the love He would have going out towards them. Under certain circumstances, with a person whom you trusted God might bring out as a saint — whom you have prayed for, and whose good you have sought in any way, yet at a given time it might be a sin to associate as a Christian. I am speaking of one who had by filthiness of flesh or spirit brought dishonour upon the name of the Lord. But though we may for the time abstain from all the expressions of loving intercourse, yet love always finds a place in which to show itself, though sometimes it may be only in the presence of God, and not manifestly to the human eye. So that, as to the manner of showing love, we must search the word of God. But the general principle cannot be doubted, that God would lay upon our hearts all the saints. He has them all upon His own heart, and He will have us to cultivate this largeness of family affection.

Accordingly Paul, who entered into this in a measure which even the saints addressed perhaps knew little of practically, adds, “Wherefore I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.” There is the title so often referred to — “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He is about to speak of the divine dealing with man and even with Christ as man; for of course it is only in that sense that one could so speak. But if dealing with us accordingly, working mercies through the risen man and fresh blessings suited to this character, yet He is “the Father of glory” as being the great Head and Fountain of all heavenly blessedness, the One from whom it all came to His own name and praise. This at once lets us into the secret of the prayer. Glory is the main thought — not the only, but the most prominent, feature of the prayer. Hence then the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, purposes and works by Him to give certain blessings to us; and it will be found that the basis of the bright pillar of blessing is Christ risen and glorified at the right hand of God. If you look at the prayer in chapter 3 there is not a word about His being there exalted “far above all principality, and power, and might;” for its subject is not glory at all, nor what God has done: it is not anything conferred upon Christ, but Himself and His love, the sum and substance of my blessing; as it is said there “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” Here the prayer in Ephesians 1 is the contrast in every way of that in Ephesians 3. In the latter, love is the parent idea, and not glory. It is well to bear in mind always this wonderful connection of love and glory; because the one would not do without the

other. And although glory be its bright manifestation and effect, yet love is still deeper and is never fully known except in the immediate presence of our Father. The kingdom is not the evidence in our case of the love of God; the proof of it on our behalf is that we are to be with the Son in the Father's house, and that we shall appear with Christ in glory. Who brings us there? The world knows nothing about the Father's house. It is a scene outside the earth, that no eye of man here below can possibly enter into. But He will also display us to the world.

Hence it is that, in John 17:22, you will find that the glory which the Father gives the Son and which the Son gives to us because of His all-perfect love — this gift is in order that the world may know that the Father sent the Son and loved us as He loved the Son. To prove the love, the glory there, as here, is set prominently forward. As we have the prayer of glory in Ephesians 1 and the prayer of love in Ephesians 3, so the glory that is given in John 17 is to prove what otherwise would not have been so clearly made known to the world. Men here below may see the glory, but they cannot enter into the love. The world will gather from our being in the glory with the Lord Jesus that we were loved with the same love wherewith the Lord Jesus was loved. Glory expresses itself outwardly, but love goes deeper still and brings one into the scene where the Father reveals Himself in His beloved Son. This is what l may call an intimate, family scene outside the world, the heavenly rest and home. It is not merely brightness, glory, majesty, or power. All these things will have their full display; but there is something deeper than all and which lies at the root of all. It is the love, which, though

it be the least entered into, yet at the same time was really before all, and that to which all will turn. It is the highest of all, and it is eternal. The kingdom may terminate — the love never. The display before the world will have a beginning and an end. But as the love will never end, so it always was in the bosom of God the Father.

Thus we have the prayer that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him.” There might be a little difficulty if it were simply “the knowledge of him.” The proper meaning of the word is “the full knowledge of him.” They already knew Him, but Paul prayed that they might know Him more. He wanted them to be fathers in Christ, and what constitutes a father is a deep and growing knowledge of Christ Himself. The Spirit of God alone could give them this entrance into it; but it was in the full knowledge of Him. “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.” We have three things here brought before us, which call for particular consideration.

First, there is “the hope of his calling.” Now I conceive that there he is referring in measure to what we have already found in the early part of the chapter. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” At any rate, I think verse 4 is before his mind’s eye here. Verse 5

brings in His place as Father. “The hope of his calling” is founded on the full blessedness that pertains to us according to that purpose of God which is already ours in Christ — already made known to us and received by our hearts — the calling of God that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. But then if this be the hope of His calling (for everything is made to flow from God Himself), he adds, “and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” (Ver. 12.) There clearly he refers to what we found in the body of the chapter: the inheritance and not only the calling. The calling was the effectual work of God’s grace, and the riches of the inheritance rather the glory suited to such a calling. But, besides this character of glory, there is, first, the hidden portion suitable to being chosen to be holy and without blame before Him in love — called to be the reflection of His own holy, loving nature, which, of course, we have got in the life of Christ, and which we shall have perfectly developed when changed into His image, from glory to glory. For His calling has its own proper hope of what we shall enjoy in His presence.

Thus there is, secondly, the inheritance. He wished them to know the riches of its glory, to know it better. But he uses a remarkable expression — “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” You must carefully guard against a prevalent error on this subject, namely, that the saints mean the inheritance. This is not at all the force of the phrase: nay, I have no hesitation in saying that it would falsify the chief blessedness of the Church’s calling. If we look at the Old Testament, we find that Israel were His inheritance and His people; and that God, by virtue of Israel, took possession of the land. When the day comes for God to be king, and more than

king, when He takes under His government the entire universe, how will this be done? Will it be by Israel? No; but by virtue of His heavenly saints — the Church of God. The expression seems to be purposely large. Most decidedly it means the saints changed or risen, so as to be in the likeness of Christ, in an entirely heavenly condition. Such is the mode in which God will challenge and assume the inheritance by and by into His own hand. When He took Canaan, He did not come down and possess it by heavenly power, but by means of His people. But when God expels the wicked spirits from any connection with the heavenly places, when He puts down all power upon the earth — everything that contradicts Himself, and reduces the whole universe into subjection to the name of Christ, who are destined to take it in His name, as Israel entered on the land of Canaan? The risen saints. Hence the meaning of the words, “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” The common notion that the saints constitute the inheritance is unscriptural. For most carefully throughout the New Testament, the saints are always represented as (not the inheritance, but) the heirs, “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” They are nowhere treated as the inheritance, but, on the contrary, what is revealed as the inheritance means the things in heaven and things on earth; and the Church is ever and sedulously separated from them. This I consider to be a point which cannot be left as an open question; the testimony of the word is too abundant and precise. We ought never to allow what is clearly revealed in Scripture to be debatable or uncertain, because doubt always has an injurious effect upon the spirit, no less than it insults God and grieves His Spirit. Another’s certainty will not do for us; but we need not hesitate to

speak plainly where we have no doubt of God's mind upon a subject. And when looked at in this point of view, it quite falls in with the structure of the chapter. As we have found "the hope of his calling" in the first clause answering to what we had in the earlier verses, so the "glory of the inheritance" answers to the middle verses of the chapter. God means to have the whole universe blest and happy under Christ; not merely glory given to Him in heaven, or a people subject to Him here below. We have here an incomparably larger view of what God intends. Christ is to have universal blessedness and glory, all things in heaven and earth being put under Him; and we have obtained in Him this inheritance.

The remaining point is, "the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." (Ver. 20.) Why not draw attention to the power that was put forth when He made the world? When Israel are addressed, He speaks of Himself as the Jehovah-God who clave the Red Sea, and brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

But what to us is the Red Sea crossed? The resurrection of Christ; not the incarnation nor even the cross of Christ, though we could not do without either. The cross, though the most essential of all things for God's glory and our need, does not give us the power of God. It shows us what God calls His weakness, and if I look at Christ there, He was "crucified through weakness." It was One who submitted to everything, who put Himself in the power of His creatures; who went down under the judgment of God and sank even under the puny hand of

man. But when we look at the resurrection, all trace of weakness is for ever past away and nothing is seen but the most triumphant power of God; a power far beyond anything connected with either the law or creation. It was a question of going down into the grave, not merely of a man, but of that man who had borne in His person the sins of every soul that believes in Him. And so completely was God glorified about these sins that He takes up the despised, rejected, forsaken man from under the unheard of burden, and puts Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. We have there the astonishing contrast between the grave in which Christ lay and the glory into which He is now exalted, still as man — the glorified man — far above all creatures, be they ever so high or blest: above creatures which were far above man in one sense and had never known taint or fall: above the principalities, authorities, dominions, powers on high, the heavenly orders, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in that which is to come. (Ver. 21.) There will be the display of angelic hosts then, when the Son of man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him. But He is raised above them all now. To be above them as God would be nothing new; He is so always. But He has carried humanity above them; He is there exalted in our nature — risen, of course, but still the nature of man. He has given us present association with the throne of God. For the application of all this is given to us here — “the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.” It is not merely the exceeding greatness of His power towards Christ, but towards us in Christ. The power that wrought in our deliverance from Satan, that

gave us our place as saints before God, is the self-same power that raised up Christ from the dead and put Him in the most glorious place in heaven. Is there anything difficult after this? If we knew we had at command the power which called the world into being, should we not laugh at impossibilities?

But we have an energy greater than that which was put forth in creation — no less than what raised up Christ from the dead. The word of God positively tells us so. Why then are we so weak? Because we so feebly believe it. The great mass of God's children never hear about it at all. But even they who, through the mercy of God, have heard, how little do they enter into it! It is one thing not to deny it doctrinally, another to apply it and live in it, not only for great straits or heavy blows, but for the ordinary train of daily duty, of that which becomes us as saints, subjecting ourselves to the will of God. We forget, if we are in circumstances of difficulty, if in the midst of foes, if we have to do with unseen enemies, what it is the apostle prays for us. That we may know the exceeding greatness of His power towards us who believe, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. If the power of the Holy Ghost so wrought in Paul, it was but the answer of the servant to the Master's heart, who was so pleading above, that we might know the power that is above all obstacles. No saints could know this till after the resurrection was accomplished. It is to usward who believe — strictly to the New Testament saints, called in after the Lord's death and resurrection.

Alas! how are the mighty fallen. How feebly they now realize their own privileges. Thus, supposing that a deliverer were expected for anything at all, it would be

perfectly right to cry for that deliverer — to feel that he was long in coming. But when he came, do you think it would be proper or suitable to urge him to come? It is the mistake people make now. They take up the language of the Psalms and apply it to christian experience. But you could not have in the Psalms the revelation of that which we have here. God's mercy you surely have previous to the resurrection of Christ; but there was no such thing as that power at work which raised up Christ from the dead. The mistake is profound who pervert the Old Testament so as to make it the language of our experience. It would be sin if one did not use the Old Testament for our own profit and good; but that would be abusing, not using, it. It is unbelief to confound anything of old with the heavenly power of Christ's resurrection.

This, then, is the measure of the power at work towards us — the same power that wrought in Christ. How are any of these things to be known according to God? "In the full knowledge of him." You will never learn any truth aright excepting in the deepening knowledge of Christ. It is the lack of this which is the cause of weakness among us: bare doctrine is not connection with Christ. When the flower is separated from that which is its source, its sustenance and support, it is thenceforth doomed to decay and death. We have that which is lovely and full of blessing in Christ; but if we are to know it such, to prove its truth, to enjoy it always, it must be in taking these things as connected with Christ. Let me look at Christ, and I see there the very life that God has given me, and the hope of it too, even as to the inheritance. Who would dare to say, it is presumption for Christ to have it? Nay, but it is what is

due to Him. God loves and delights in Him as man so well, that He could not keep back a single thing that He has made from Him. He is the heir of it all; and we, hidden in Christ, can enter into the fulness of His calling, and into the inheritance, because we merge into union with Christ. And as you can only know the calling and the inheritance in the full knowledge of Christ, so it is also with “the exceeding greatness of his power.”

The height of that power is what God put forth when He raised up Christ “from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places,” etc. He has given Him the supreme seat of glory. No matter what could be conceived of the highest angel or archangel, Christ has received a higher dignity, and this place. He holds in present association with us while we are here. It is One who not only owns us and is kind to us, and uses the greatness of His glory for our good, but far more. He who is at the head of a vast empire can turn the throne to the good of his subjects and the glory of those whom he desires to honour; but there is no positive, immediate, personal association with him. This is what the Christian has with Christ. Nothing less than to be one with Christ is what we have here.

Therefore it is added, that this blessed One, under whose feet God has put everything, has been also given to be head over all things to the Church. It is not said, “head over the church,” but “head over all things to the church.” (Ver. 22.) The Church shares His place of headship over all; but as His body, in inseparable union with Him. The glorified Man has universal exaltation over all the creatures of God; and this He shares with us, and will soon manifest as our portion with Him. The Christian is now a member of Christ’s body — now,

therefore, by the Holy Ghost, in the most intimate association with Christ, not only as having life in Him, but as enjoying oneness with Him who is the supreme exalted Head over all. He is a member of His body; and although it was not to Eve directly that God gave the dominion, yet did she share it by His will. It was given to Adam, but by association Eve had it along with Adam. So the Church has it as the dependent and associated Eve of the heavenly Man, the last Adam. This gives us at once a bright view of what our calling is, and why God looks for complete separation from the world. In the time of the Protector in this country, it would have been improper for any one that held to the royal family to seek or even accept a post of honour. So with the Christian now. We belong to One who is hidden away from the earth — exalted now into this universal headship. The world that we see is not yet put under Christ practically, though to faith all things are; but we know that He is exalted, “head over all things to the church.”

We belong to Him, and He would have our hearts lifted up above all the present scene. The Church is “His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” (Ver. 23.) It is the complement, or that which fills up Christ, looked at as man risen from the dead. As Son of God He, of course, requires nothing to complete His glory; but as man He does. He would no mare be complete in His resurrection-glory without the Church, than Adam would have been without Eve. And God has, in the counsels of His glory, so ordered it. He meant, from all eternity, that when His Son became this blessed, glorified man, He should share for His own honour and praise all the glory He had as the risen man with those who were by nature

poor, dead sinners, but now delivered from their sins, and made one with Christ on high. By the Spirit now given He communicates the knowledge of it to them while in the world, that they may be in spirit and ways entirely above the world.

1 As the verse contains several words and clauses which are not generally understood, it may be added in this note that the word “dispensation” (οἰκονομία) has no reference to a particular period or age (which is in the New Testament expressed by αἰών). It means “stewardship,” or rather “administration,” the particular form here meant being the summing, or heading (ἀνακεφαλαίωτις) up of all things, heavenly and earthly, under Christ. This will be in the age to come, when Christ shall be displayed as Head over all things, and the glorified saints shall reign with Him. It is neither this age, during which Satan is still permitted to reign as the god of this world the prince of the power of the air; nor is it the eternal state, when all government is over, and Christ will have given up the kingdom, that God may be all in all. It is the intervening millennium. This will he the fulness of the times, previous periods having been the necessary preparation for it. Meanwhile, redemption through Christ’s blood having been effected, the Holy Ghost seals the believer, and is the earnest of the inheritance.

Ephesians 2

We now enter upon a new portion of our epistle; is not so exalted in its tone as that which we have glanced over in chapter 1, equally important in its place and of the utmost moment to us. But then we must carefully bear in mind that what is of interest to us is not an adequate measure in looking at either the word of God or His ways. God never acts for anything short of His own glory. So that although we find many parts of the word of God which in the very closest way touch our condition, wants, blessing and glory, we invariably fall short of the just scope and standard of the truth of God, if we limit our thoughts by its application to ourselves. Never do we reach the full extent of any truth in its bearing upon us, unless we also take into account its infinitely higher range as the revealed display of God's glory, character, and purposes. Hence it is, that although we find in the Scripture grace already shown to us, and glory that we are soon to participate in, yet how infinite the blessing when we no longer look at it as that which is directly toward creatures so limited and feeble as ourselves! When we realize that it is the grace and the glory of God, how all is changed completely! We then hear and find out this grand truth — He does speak of us and feel for us in ways, forms, depths, and heights suited to Himself. He enters into all our little wants as well as all our greatest. But still, if it were the least thing He meets in us, the supply of that want flows from One who has no limits; and if it be suited to our capacity for the present moment, it will not be always so. God will never rest in His love till He has not only given us by the Holy Ghost now to taste in measure the

sweetness of the display of His own character. but made us in every way worthy of it. He has called us to be His children. The day is coming when not merely His love will not be ashamed so to call us, but when there will be no reason why it should be: when, on the contrary, everything that pertains to the family of God will savour just as much of what He is as, alas! now our poor, pitiful, worldly ways often tell a painful tale of self and not God.

In this chapter then it is, not the unfolding of God's counsels and magnificent purposes as they flow from His own mind — consequently going back to the beginning of time, and before creation had a place at all as a matter of fact, when all was but God Himself in the eternity of His own existence. Even then, as Ephesians 1 told us, before His hand had been put forth in anything, there was this blessed thought in His heart: He meant to have a people, yea, sons, out of the scene that was yet to be created, gathered by His own sovereign grace out of sin, to be the partakers of His love and of His holiness, along with His beloved Son. This was His counsel. Chapter 1 showed us this, not only what was in God's mind from eternity, but the answer to it in the day of glory that is coming. For two great thoughts were brought before us there: first, the calling of God; and next, the inheritance that is yet to be displayed in the bright display of glory when Christ shall take everything that God has made, and will be the acknowledged, glorified Head of it (all things, whether in heaven or on earth, being put under Him); and when we who believed in Him shall be called to the place of sharing that inheritance along with Him, our Lord and Bridegroom. Thirdly, we saw an added and most weighty point — that the same power of God which raised up Christ from the

dead is at work toward believers now. This was only alluded to passingly in the prayer of the apostle at the end of chapter 1. What we have here is, to a certain point, a kind of development of it. Chapter 2 is mainly based on His resurrection-power; nay, not this only, but, if I may so say, ascension-power. The energy which raised up Christ and set Him at the right hand of God, is now put forth on behalf of and working in those that believe in Him. We shall see the consequences of this. But now let us weigh for a moment what the Holy Ghost here brings out. It is the application of the mighty power of God to the believer. It is not, therefore, simply the purpose of grace, nor the execution of that purpose in glory by and by, but it is the exercise of His power after the pattern of Christ risen and glorified, and the application of it to the believer even now.

Hence we have necessarily first brought before us the condition of those in whom the power is put forth, what they were when it began to work in them. Accordingly it is only in chapter 2 that we begin to have any development of the actual condition of those with whom God is so nearly linked. Chapter 1 is mainly occupied with what God had in His mind, and what He will yet accomplish. Now we have the question raised and answered, Who are these people, and what was their state when God could so deal with them? And it is most marvellous, that, when we come to hear His word, there is in no other epistle any portion that gives us so deep, searching, humiliating a picture of the desperate, degraded state in which those were whom God destined to be joint-heirs with Christ. The laying bare moral corruptions we have in Romans, fully proving what man is if he take the ground of anything within him. Whether

the favoured Jew under the law, or the Gentile with his conscience, all is thoroughly discussed there, and every pretension of man is ground to powder. But in Ephesians the proof of guilt is needless. Man is viewed as so completely dead, that it is but the removal of the cloth from off the corpse. Therefore the apostle says, “You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.” It is not simply, How is a sinner to be forgiven, justified? but “You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.” The words “hath he quickened” are inserted, it is true, in italics, but it is the evident and necessary sense; without it, to an English reader, the sentence would be embarrassed. It is not till verses 4, 5 that we have the completion of the thought. It is plain that the quickening affects those that are called — “you,” as well as those designated “us.” I shall hope to show the meaning of the distinction presently, but I only refer to it now in order to guard against the notion, that there is no sufficient reason for inserting in English the expression, “You hath be quickened;” whereas it is implied in the language that the Holy Ghost used, or at least in the sense.

The grand fact remains. It is not merely a question of disease in the moral state of man; but they are “dead.” What a blow to all the thoughts of man — to the notion that he is in a state of probation — that he is in a mere sickly state of soul; and if you only soothe and comfort and educate him, after all he is not so bad! Some people think there is a difference between believers and unbelievers in their unconverted state: this I deny. As to men being born, some of them more worthy of having mercy shown them than others, the idea is contrary to every word of God that treats of the subject. On the

contrary, what the Holy Ghost insists upon is the real death and equal ruin of all. In Romans it is said that we were “without strength,” but here we were “dead.” The only way in which death is spoken of in Romans is as a privilege, the happy condition into which faith brought us when baptized unto the death of Christ. We are thus viewed as being dead to sin and alive to God.

In Ephesians, on the contrary, death was our misery. It was the expression of God’s mind about the extreme ruin in which we lay. We have both Jews and Gentiles (neither now first or last) — man as such — morally dead; so that it becomes a question of what God can do. God above, and man here below, are in the presence of each other; and if man is dead, thanks be to God! He raises the dead, and can and does quicken souls. The immortality of the soul is certain. However, what Scripture calls “life” is not bare existence, but a blessed spiritual nature given to a man who naturally was without it and merely felt or acted after a nature under sin. Such is the condition of every person until the Spirit of God has wrought this good work upon the soul.

Our Lord reproaches Nicodemus for not understanding this. Even as a Jew he ought to have done so; but as a “master in Israel” was it not a shame that he should not know these things? When he heard of the necessity of being “born again,” or on an altogether new principle, he imagined that the Saviour might speak of some repeated natural birth, which, if possible, would have been but the old thing over again. But the word “afresh” (ἄνωθεν) is exceedingly emphatic; and so is the opening out of the truth. Hearken to this: “that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Flesh never can become spirit.

There is no such thing as spiritualizing the old nature, and making it new and holy. What the unregenerate soul wants is a new nature, or, as the Lord explains it, to be "born of water and of the Spirit." It is the word of God, figuratively presented thus, and applied by the power of the Holy Ghost to the soul, which is the meaning of the passage. Baptism may set forth that which is conveyed by it, but it is a figure of a reality. Our Lord shows that there must be a new life imparted; and, as we are told elsewhere, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And this is brought out not only by James, but by Peter also, where he declares that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." We know positively from the Apostle Paul, that the washing of water by the word is God's own explanation of the figure.

Again, what could Nicodemus have known about christian baptism? It was not then instituted; and the disciples' baptism was only a sort of modification of St. John's rite, i.e., the confession of a living Messiah, coming or come on earth. But proper christian baptism is founded upon the death and resurrection of our Lord. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ, were baptized unto his death?" Christian baptism is the confession of the death and resurrection of Christ, and was instituted by our Lord when He rose from the dead. Then, and not before, He told them to go forth, baptizing all nations, or Gentiles, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He laid down the grand, full, christian revelation of the Godhead, into the confession of which the believer is brought by his baptism.

In the Scriptures just alluded to, we find clearly that, where unfigurative language is used, the means of giving the new life is said to be the word of God applied by the Holy Ghost; and that, when figures are used, water is what is chosen. But the sum and substance of the entire teaching is, that the testimony of God is the divine means of communicating life to the soul when applied by the Holy Ghost — that is, by faith. And if we want still further to know what specially in the truth of God is used to quicken those who are dead in sins, it is always, more or less, the revelation of Christ. My believing that the creature was made by God will not quicken my soul. I might believe any facts in the Old Testament, and be assured of all the miracles, discourses, and ways of Jesus in the New, and yet my soul might still be unquickened. But believing in Christ Himself is a very different thing from not doubting things about Him. It supposes that I have, more or less, come to an end of myself; that I have bowed to the humiliating sentence of Scripture upon my nature, and that I own myself to be only a poor, lost, dead creature in the sight of God.

All this is beyond nature. Some men are proud of the affections we share with the brutes, and some still more deify themselves because of conscience; but even conscience was acquired by sin. Adam, before the fall, could not have told what good and evil was. He did not avoid eating the forbidden fruit, because he knew it was in itself evil; nor was there indeed anything morally wrong in its own nature in eating the fruit of that tree. But the command of God made it a test — a moral test that Adam would have known nothing about unless God had told him, “Thou shalt not eat.” Thus, for the purpose

of exercising a child's obedience, it might be said, You are not to go out of this room: it might have been all right before. It was only after eating of the forbidden fruit that Adam obtained the distinctive and intuitive knowledge of good and evil. Thus he knew evil only by being under its power. Had it been said to Adam before the fall, "Thou shalt not lust or covet," he might have said, What does it mean? I do not understand. But the moment he listened to the devil, and took the fruit that God forbade, there was another element infused into Adam's nature that had not been there before. Unfallen, he had body, soul, and spirit; after the fall, he acquired what Scripture calls "the flesh." This is not mere "flesh and blood:" our Lord had these, (else He could not have been truly a man,) but not "the flesh," which is the principle of self-will, or liking our own way, and not God's. This is sin, and what Scripture means by sin — that strong, restless craving to have what we wish, whether God wills it or not. Satan blinds the soul as to what is God's will, God's mind. The love of one's own will was not in the original nature of man. "The flesh" was gained through the fall, and shows itself in love of our own will and independence of God. St. Paul constantly dwells upon it, as it is also what St. John (1 John 3:4) really calls "lawlessness," rather than, as we have it, "transgression of the law." It is the wish for our way in despite of God's will and way, whether expressed or implied. It is the essence of sin, the sad inheritance of sinners, from which, thank God, the believer is delivered. So that, when a man receives Christ, he has still his old nature, not only body, soul, and spirit, but even "the flesh" — for this, too, he has still, and it may be, alas! the occasion of many a slip and sorrow, if he be

unwatchful. Besides these, there is for the believer a new nature that he had not before.

God has given us a new life, and this is just as distinct in its workings as the old life is. But God has quickened us and given us a new life. Look at a man: what is there? Self-love; a little bit of pride here and of vanity there; love of one's own will everywhere — the characteristic of the sinner under all circumstances. Search and see, and you will not have to search long before you find that which betrays not Christ, but Adam. Look at the history of man, as given in Genesis, and there see what he is. He might be enticed by his affections. But why allow his affections so to work as to carry him into disobedience against God? Had God told him to listen to his wife? He ought to have acted as the head, and have reminded her of what God told them. And God's order is never forgotten with impunity. So man, having allowed the wife to take the lead, soon reaped the bitter consequences. But in Christ I have the exact contrary. What more remarkable feature morally can be than this? — A person, who, while He was everything, was content to be nothing; who, while He was man here below, never acted upon His own independent title; who always, under every circumstance, great or small, sought and was subject to His Father's will. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" says He, in Luke 2, when only a child. It was not only when He came publicly forward, but He had the consciousness of it always. And if I want to know what our Lord was as He grew up to mature years, there, too, I find it. And wherever I look at Him, this crowning feature shows itself in all times and circumstances — One that never sought and never did His own will.

There, do you not see, is another sort of man altogether? No wonder the Holy Ghost says about Him, and Him only, “the Second man.” All other men were only just so many reproductions of Adam, so many sons in his own likeness, after his own image. As far as they were men, viewed simply as such, they bore that one common character of Adam. But now comes forth another man; and from and in this dead and risen stock we become new creatures, having His life communicated to us by faith in Him. As by natural birth we have the life of Adam, so we have what would naturally flow from such a frightful beginning — the same self-will, weakness, boastfulness, dread of God, dishonesty and insolence towards Him, etc. Such is man: such, too, is just what I find in my own self; and if I read the Bible aright, God will force me to own it. When quickening a soul, He always obliges it to take up the picture and say, That is myself, black as it is. Then, when a person is broken down under the awful discovery of sin within, and judges it according to God, this is what Scripture calls repentance. It is owning not only what we have done, but what we are also. How is it to be remedied? “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The Spirit has given a new life, and in this world, through the knowledge of Christ. Hence it is by the word of God (“faith cometh by hearing,” etc.), not by baptism, or any other institution of the Lord, blessed as they are. We must take care that we put things in their proper places. It is the word brought home by the Holy Ghost that produces faith, and this not by mending the first, but by revealing the last, Adam. God has come down from heaven to accomplish this great purpose — to give me this new life — to deliver me from sin and self: and how is it done? It

is the Holy Ghost who effects it by the word of God, which makes Christ known to the soul.

But here the apostle does not enter into the detail of it; he is merely telling out the grand facts: “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins (the worst of all deaths); wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” Does it not show how active in evil was this kind of death? These dead were at the same time walking according to the age of this world; which, indeed, was the proof of their moral death. They had no desire to shape their walk according to God’s word. As Job says (Job 21:14), “Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” And was not this the condition of our own souls? Can we not remember when it was a painful thing to have to meet God about our sins? I must have to do with God. And here is the solemnity of it. If I do not meet God now about the Saviour, I shall have to meet Him about my sins. And if I despise meeting the Saviour about my sins, meet God I must in my sins — to be lost for ever. You put a sort of honour upon an enemy by paying attention to him; but you cannot more deeply insult a friend than by paying no heed nor notice. So it is as to indifference about Christ. Perhaps we try to settle accounts with God once or twice a day — what a wrong to God and a wrong to my soul! If I have sins upon me — and in that condition we all are and have been naturally — what is to be done? It is easy to say what we have been doing — walking “according to the course of this world.” This is not merely gross things. Supposing that people were all

as courteous and kind as possible — that there were no such things as jails and judges, nor convicts punished: supposing that men could be reasoned out of their wickedness, what would still be the condition of men?" That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Man, as such, never can see the kingdom of God. The only way by which I can be brought into His kingdom is by being born anew, and having that new nature which is of Christ and not of Adam. Baptism is the sign of it. Paul had already believed on the Lord when Ananias said to him, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." There is the figure of washing; but the only effective means or instrument in the sight of God is the blood of Christ. "To him that loveth us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

The thought, then, of quickening leads the apostle to bring out the condition from which they were delivered. They were walking according to this world's age; and not only so, but according to the arch-enemy. The title, "Prince of the power of the air," was to set forth his all-permeating influence. As the air surrounds and penetrates everything, so does the devil the realm of nature — "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." This was the way they showed that they were under his power — by their disobedience. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past." Why is it "we?" Why this change from "you" to "we"? When addressing the Ephesians, who had been Gentiles, he uses the word "ye;" but he includes now in this moral sentence, "dead in trespasses and sins," Jews as well as Gentiles. When God was measuring man by Christ, this was their state — not a single being that was not dead. And there can be no degrees of death. If a man is dead,

there is an end of him. So that, although, if you look at men morally, you may draw distinctions, and say, There is a man going farther and faster on the downward way than others, yet, if you look deeper still, these distinctions vanish, and they are all indiscriminately ruined, yea, dead, in the sight of God. So he says, as proving this, “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts.” No matter who we were, or what, he calls it all “the lusts of our flesh.” But some of them might have been philosophers, and some benevolent and moral, some gross people living in open and atrocious wickedness. But take the best of them, and judge them by this: — was it their life-breath and governing motive to do the will of God? Not at all. They might have been gratifying their own kindly nature; but God was not in their thoughts; or it was a kind of bribing God to let them off. For in heathenism there was a tradition that a sacrifice was necessary; but it was corrupted, and degraded, and perverted in all sorts of ways.

Here, then, we have the common condition in which all, Jews and Gentiles, were by nature. Yet he distinguishes “the desires (or wills) of the flesh and the thoughts,” by which he means the grosser tendencies, and the more refined, intellectual workings. Supposing a man devoting himself to science, and making it his object, is this to do the will of God? Nay, but rather the indulgence of the desires of the mind, and as thoroughly self as with others who might be given up to the coarser appetites of nature. The grand thing is, that I have no right to myself — I belong to another. Am I doing His will? Then, when we enter the relationships of faith, we are not merely

the Lord's creatures, responsible to do His bidding as a natural duty, but bought with the blood of Christ, and alive in Him from the dead, that we should henceforth live, not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again. Let it be the choicest men that the world can boast of: this is their state — "by nature the children of wrath even as others." What a word! Even the Jews, who had the light of God as far as outward light was concerned, were "by nature" the children of wrath, as much as the degraded, idolatrous, stock-and-stone-worshipping Gentiles. So that there can be no more complete annihilation of all man's religious privilege as well as creature-standing, than what we have in this verse. It is not only that people have done wrong, but they were by nature the children of wrath. God did not make man so: it was man who chose the path of disobedience, who gave up God for the devil. He did not, of course, intend this; for Satan comes in as an angel of righteousness; but however he may work, this is the one result to which all are reduced without exception — "by nature children of wrath." And what does God? For there is the absolute necessity that God should act in order to bring in one ray of light into the midst of this hopeless wreck and ruin. But people will not believe that they are ruined; they will think that it is a good world after all, and a state of things God has given man to cultivate, forgetting that God "drove out the man," and that all the inventions of man are only expedients to cover his nakedness, and to lead him to overlook that he is an exile from Paradise. Of course these inventions we can use, if we do not abuse them. But let us bear in mind that, as Christians, our life, our home, is not here; we belong to another scene, where Christ is. We are not of the world; we are purchased to do God's will, sanctified

to obedience, to the same kind of obedience as our Lord's. Do we weigh and apply this earnestly, assiduously, conscientiously, within the bosom of the family of God, or wherever we may be placed? In our Lord was life, and He was ever happy in the consciousness of His Father's love. The believer, too, has life in Him, and is loved as He was loved. God may use the ten commandments to crush a man in the flesh; but as a believer, he is called to obey as Christ obeyed, to walk as He walked; for He left us an example that we should follow His steps.

Here, then, we have this mighty intervention of God, who, "rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness upon us through Christ Jesus." Not only are we quickened — this would have been true, looking at any saint that ever lived on the face of the earth. But could you have said that all were raised up together with Christ? seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus? Is it not a fuller statement of the blessing that belongs to us as Christians now, which could not be predicated of any till the resurrection and ascension of Christ were facts? Our Lord says, "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." Why does He draw the distinction between life, and life "more abundantly?"

On what principle, then, is it that Christ quickens at all? Because in Him, the Son, is life; and this life becomes the portion of the believer in Him. "For the hour is

coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live." He was always the source of life to the soul, no matter when or where, though it was, of course, only in virtue of foreseen redemption that sinful men could receive it. Before His death and resurrection, however, it was simply life. But our Lord added, "and I will give it more abundantly." The disciples who then surrounded Him already had life because they believed in Him. But when our Lord rose from the dead, the first time He appeared among the disciples, He breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." What was this? The Spirit as the power of life more abundantly (not as gift yet). He gave them life while He was here, and when risen He imparted it more abundantly, life in resurrection.

What is the difference, people may ask, to us? Immense. But the difference in the mind of God is the main thing and how it bears upon His glory. Therefore, whether understanding it or not, I desire to bow and bless God, perfectly sure that there is a wise and good reason for everything He does and says. We are to be raised by and by from the dead: our bodies are still unchanged. The body of the believer decays and crumbles like the unbeliever's, yet he has the resurrection-life of Christ, this life "more abundantly." "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you," was not a word merely for the twelve. No doubt they had a mission that none of us has. But while this is true, and none now can be put on a level with them as apostles, yet at the same time I maintain that they also had administrative functions, apart from their special apostolic character, and in those, not in this, they have successors. Our Lord met, on that day when He rose, "the disciples," which

embraces a far wider thought. It was the then christian company, all that were there, whether men or women, if they were disciples. It was upon these He breathed. They were all to have His more abundant life. The effect is, that all are brought into liberty. (Comp. Rom. 8:1, 2.)

I do not enter farther into the very blessed accompaniments of this new life, but only remark that, as to being raised and sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, all is spoken of as being now true of the believer. There is no such mystical notion meant by this as that we are not on earth or in our bodies here. Everything in Scripture is the very reverse of extravagance. Mysticism is the devil's imitation of God's mysteries, and the mere mist of men's fancies. "Mystery" in Scripture means nothing vague, but truth the human intellect would never discover, which, when presented by the Holy Ghost to the new nature, is perfectly intelligible. Some things are of a profounder character than others, and there may be that which is beyond all knowledge, as, for instance, the nature of the Son of God. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father;" and it is not said of the Son, "he to whom the Father shall reveal Him." The Father maintains with holy jealousy the inscrutable glory of the person of His Son. But apart from this, the mysteries of Scripture are truths once locked up but now revealed and intended to be known, and in fact the portion and joy of the believer.

We have already glanced at the strong contrast drawn between man's condition in the first three verses, and the mighty intervention of God's grace that follows. We have seen the Gentile brought out in the dark portrait of abject moral corruption and senseless idolatry, the Holy Spirit laying everything bare in a few mighty touches.

They were “dead in trespasses and sins,” thoroughly subject to the prince of this world. They were merely pursuing the course of this age, children of disobedience, without reference to God in their ways. There is no thought of bringing out in detail the frightful forms of human impiety, or the depravity and degradation into which man has fallen under Satan’s instigation. Nevertheless we have a far deeper view of the hopelessly evil condition of man here, than even when all the details of impurity, superstition, and rebellion are entered into at full length. In the word of God, how little the energy depends on seeming strength of language! Still less is it what we find with men when they wish to put a thing forcibly. Of violent, exaggerated expression there is nothing in Scripture.

We have simply (and what a fact it is!) God Himself sounding the condition of man, no longer looking at the heart as if it were a question of restraining its desires, which He did under the law. But now it is the utter death of nature in the presence of God — the power of Satan substituted instead of God’s government — man himself evidently and hopelessly ruined. But into this scene of death God enters — God who is rich in mercy. And the great love wherewith He loved us is just alluded to as the spring of all that He has done. “God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us, eves when we were dead in sins” — “we,” whether Jews or Gentiles, but more particularly referring to the Jew here. At least he had contrasted the two in verses 2, 3. In verse 5 he may possibly be bringing them both in; but if any be particularly alluded to, it is the Jew, for he is as dead as the Gentile — there is no difference as to this. “Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened

us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Having already entered into the general subject of regeneration, I would only just add, that although, now that Christianity is divulged, we have regeneration going on at least as much as ever, we have in fact the Holy Ghost stamping upon the regeneration of the present time a deeper character. For it is not only that there is life given, or souls born again, but they are quickened together with Christ. Language like this could not have been used before Christ's death and resurrection. There can be no hesitation, that all the life which any saint ever received from the beginning of the world, was of and through Christ. "In him was life." He is the eternal life that was with the Father, and other life there is none for a sinner. There was a tree of life before man fell; not only a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but a tree of life. But this was only creature-life, that might have sustained an innocent creature to the end. But what, if the creature fell? What, when Adam became a sinful man? Would the tree of life avail for him then? Not for a moment. "So he drove out the man." God would not permit that man should touch the mere natural tree of life. For supposing he had eaten of it after sin, what would have resulted? Only a perpetuation of evil in a wretched, remediless condition of sin — an eternal existence in a condition alienated from God, from which there was no escape. So that, although death came in as the sentence upon a guilty man, there is in a sense mercy in it, now that man is born into a sinful world, and is subject to every kind of misery, which an enemy has brought in, and which, if you look at death as a part of it, may be the just sentence of God upon man's iniquity. But all this is laid

hold of by Satan, and turned to his purposes, mingled with bad conscience, on which Satan works, so that a man is filled with dread and horror of God. From this God, by presenting Christ, delivers the soul. It is not only that the soul finds a life that is suited to its every need; it is not at all a mere perpetuating one's existence in misery; but life in Christ ensures deliverance out of evil and all its effects and curse, flowing from God in His grace, founded upon holiness; and a holy blessedness in the presence of God is in that same Christ who brings in this life. There is also God recovered by the soul, as surely as He recovers it to Himself. It was not only that man by sin lost natural life, but he lost God; and it is not only that Christ gives me now a new and better life than the tree of life could give, but He gives me God; He brings me to God and puts me in the presence of God. He makes known God to my soul, and gives me to be sure of His love, of His interest in me, of His deep pity and even complacency; for God cannot only love in a natural way, but with a love of complacency and special relationship.

This, then, is what we find in Christ; and although life could be spoken of in connection with all the Old Testament saints ere Christ died and rose, still I doubt much that the Spirit of God could speak of the life which they received, as being life with Christ. Life by and in Christ it could not but be; but quickening with Christ goes a great deal farther. And this is what we have now. For God points us to Christ under the burden of our sins, under the whole consequences of that which my nature deserved because of its distance and enmity to God — its spirit of disobedience and self-will. All the evil was charged upon Him, and He was treated as if He were it

all; as if He, suffering for us on the cross, had the entire sum and substance of the evil of human nature in His own person. Of course, had there been a single particle of it in Himself, He could not have atoned for others — the judgment of God must have been upon it; but the total absence of it in His own person was what indicated His perfect fitness to be the victim. God was dealing with the whole height and length and depth and breadth of sin in the person of Christ upon the cross. But God raised up that same blessed One who went down under the wrath of God, and who, when He had tasted what it was to be forsaken and God's face hid from Him, did not and could not depart from this life without saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," which showed the perfect confidence of His heart and delight in God. "Our fathers trusted in thee.... they cried unto thee and were delivered." But He could not be heard till the full trial was closed. He was only heard from the horns of the unicorn. He must go through it all — unutterable sorrow and anguish, intolerable to all but Him; and yet to Him, what was it not? — all the wrath of God if the deliverance was to be complete and according to God. But He has done so; and He lets us know, in departing from the scene, that however He might suffer, yet His heart truly rested in God; and He confessed unwaveringly, not only that God continued holy, but that the Father was full of love. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

But now we have another thing altogether — God interposing to deliver to the uttermost. He would not say that He quickened Christ absolutely. It is always qualified somehow, because Christ was life Himself. He was the eternal life with the Father, in due time

manifested on the earth; and how say anything that would imply that He owed His life to another? He might say that, as man put to death in the flesh, He was quickened of the Spirit, but His intrinsic personal glory abides, which indeed gave its value to the whole extent of His humiliation and suffering unto death. The Father, too, gave Him as a man to have life in Himself. This was the perfection of Christ here below: He would not take it as His own right; He would not speak a word nor do a work that He had not heard from and in God. He was the perfectly dependent man. The same Gospel that dwells, as none other does, on His divine glory, shows us also His absolute dependence on God. On the other hand, how sweet to see in Scripture how God the Father watches over the glory of Christ! He would not say one word that could in any way impair the dignity of His Son.

Here, therefore, it is said, He hath “quickened us together with Christ!” It was we that needed the life. Christ might have gone down into death, but He has quickened us together with Him. Christ had died in a more solemn manner than any mere man could die. He was emphatically the Holy One of God, the only holy man, and yet even so had He died. Of course, no unholy one could die as He died. He knew what it was to taste death in all its bitterness, God’s judgment and wrath, as none other could; and yet He was one who felt it so much the more because He was essentially in the bosom of the Father. But this blessed One having gone down thoroughly under death as the judgment of God upon our nature and our sins, thereon ensues the mighty power of God, who has quickened us together with Christ. In a word, the life is in the most intimate

association with Christ, and we are in union with Christ Himself, put to death in the flesh, but now quickened by the Spirit. As to the life that He had here below, it was given up and gone; and now He rises in a new condition of life, in resurrection. It is therefore immediately added that God not only quickened us together with Christ, but raised us up together; and more than this, He made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Thus the full value that belongs to life, as it is now in Christ, is also given to us; so that we can be spoken of, even while we are in this world, according to the complete blessedness of life as it is now seen in Christ at the right hand of God.

Let us consider what such a marvellous thought as this involves — what it brings us into association with. We know what our old nature loves, and does, and is; we know too well what the life, or rather the death, of Adam, dragged us into. What have we derived from our first father — what have we deserved and brought on ourselves, but sin, sorrow, suffering, sickness, death, a bad conscience, and a fearful looking for of judgment? All these things we have as the workings and effects of that existence which we have inherited, our sad heirloom from the first man. But now comes the new and supernatural source of life in the Second Man; and where shall we best know its character? Let us look up at Christ. How does God the Father regard Him? Is He delighted in Him? He was always so; and surely never more than when He traced Christ's steps as He walked a Man among men. But there was the terrible question of sin — our sin. Is it an unsettled question now? Or has Christ in very deed answered it for ever in the cross? Yes, it is the very thing that has given occasion for God

to show His love as nothing else could. How should I have known how much God loves me if I had not had such depth of need as an enemy of God, fathomless save to His saving mercy in Christ? I do not say it to lighten the sin of my enmity to God, nor to allow the notion that there was or could be the smallest title to the favour of God. But my hopeless evil becomes a measure of the depth of His love; and this because it brings Christ into the scene, yea, Christ as a Redeemer and Saviour on God's part — Christ the infinite gift of God's grace — Christ, who would be turned aside by nothing — Christ, who endured everything from man, Satan, and God's righteous judgment, that we might be saved after a divine sort. And so in truth we are. And what do we not owe the Saviour and the God who gave Him? But what did not Christ bear? Our frightful ruin and sin has just brought out what God is in His great love to us, and what Christ is in His value, and the mighty power of the life in which He is risen and gone up, seated, and ourselves in Him, in heavenly places. Do you still ask what the character of the life is that the Christian possesses now? Look at Christ, and see how precious He is to God — how He cannot have the Blessed One, who is the full expression of that life, too near Himself. He has raised Him up and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. In Ephesians 2 it is simply "made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." It is not added here, as in Ephesians 1, "at his own right hand." I am not aware that such words are ever said about the children of God, nor do I think they could be. Do they not rather seem to be the personal place of Christ? But it is said "in the heavenly places," because it is to them, and not to the earth, that we belong. Israel, as such, in their best days, belonged to the earth (as did we, far off,

in our worst); but now it is not only that our names are written in heaven, though that very expression shows the wonderful love of God which destines and enrolls us to be above — which connects us with heaven while we are upon the earth: all that is true; but we have much more in Ephesians. There we find that, in virtue of our union with Christ, we are said to be not only raised with Him, but seated with Him in heavenly places. In a word, what is said of Christ Himself is true by grace of us, only excepting what may be personal in Him as God the Son, or used of the Lord in a necessarily pre-eminent degree. For after all there is a distinction between the Head and the body, even as such; though, on the other hand the very difference shows the closest possible association: we are His fulness or complement.

We learn, then, from this that we have Christ's own title while we are in this world — nay, more than that, Christ's own life is ours, by virtue of which we are said to be quickened with Him, yea, raised and seated in Him in heavenly places. But let us carefully bear in mind that all this is never said of any in purpose or election, but only where faith exists. It is not applicable to us before we believe: it would not be true of any person before there is positive, living association with Christ. What is commonly called Calvinistic theology, much truth as it embodies, is totally false on this head. One of its main features is the endeavour to make out that, the love of God being from everlasting to everlasting, our relationship is always precisely the same; that because God has the purpose of making us His children, He always regards us as His children; that if a man be elect, supposing him still an infidel or a blasphemer, he is as much a son of God as when he is regenerate of the Holy

Ghost and walking in the ways of God. It maintains that God loves him with exactly the same love (while he is, for example, a sot or a swearer) as afterwards. What among believers can be conceived more dishonouring to God and destructive to man than this doctrine? Manifestly the apostle is speaking here, not of persons elect merely, though, of course, they were elect, but quickened. That is, they had actually life. Not only was there a purpose of God about them, but they were then living to God as those who had faith in Christ. You could not say that a man has life before he has faith. It is the reception of Christ by the Holy Ghost which, on the one side, is called faith, and on the other, life. You could not rightly put one before the other. If you could scarcely say that faith was before life, certainly life is not before faith. The first exercise of faith is the first also of life. It is the power of the Spirit of God presenting Christ to the soul. Hence it is said, “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” The living is there, if there be any difference at all, the effect of hearing, rather than the hearing the effect of living. This is very important; because none can affirm that persons are quickened with Christ until they are here to be called; and it is impossible to say that they have life till they have heard the voice of the Son of God. The first proof that a man is a sheep is that he hears the good Shepherd’s voice. He is not thrown on certain (or rather uncertain) indications, of life within himself, but on the grand, objective test and evidence which God demands — not merely what I am doing, or not doing (the law asked this), but whether I receive and rest on the Son of God. Am I drawn away from all the sounds of the world? and is His voice attracting my soul? As sure as this is so,

you have life. “He that believeth hath everlasting life.” “He that hath the Son hath life.” I prove that I have it by the very simple, sure, and blessed fact that I hear the voice of the Son of God. Thus only I have life — then only am I assured of being quickened and raised with Christ. Mark, it is association with Christ after He had gone under death for our sins, which is the christian character of quickening. We are also said to be seated in heavenly places, because we have the life of Christ who is there, and we are spoken of according to the place which He has entered who is our life. So that Scripture does not merely mean that we are so in God’s decree or thought, when it says that He has raised us up and made us sit together in heavenly places. The reference is not to our future resurrection, but expressly to the present association of the believer by virtue of union with Christ, who is in the presence of God. And, in alluding to this first part of it, the apostle says, “By grace ye are saved.” This is the source of all the blessing. Hence the expression is very strong. For what the form of the word implies is that the salvation was complete, and that they were now enjoying its present result. Salvation in Scripture is not always thus treated: there are whole Epistles where it is never so spoken of. Thus, particularly in Philippians, salvation is regarded as a future thing — as not complete till we see Christ in glory. Salvation, there, is a solemn but not precarious process, which is now going on, because it is plain that we are not with Christ in glory, but in our natural bodies. And accordingly Christ is therein seen as a Saviour, not merely because He died and rose, but because He is coming back for my full deliverance and joy. This explains the meaning of the text which has perplexed some so much — “work out your own

salvation with fear and trembling;" because, in the sense intended there, we shall only get salvation when we are glorified with Christ. Meanwhile, we are working it out with fear and trembling, remembering that Satan hates us because we are to be in glory with Christ. We are viewed as persons in this world, who know that there is not the slightest doubt that we are to have the prize, but we have to fight and run for it, though we ought to hold fast the assurance that we shall have it when we see Christ coming for us from on high.

But when we take up the language of the Ephesian Epistle, all is different. There salvation is regarded as an absolutely past thing: "By grace ye are saved" — not merely that it is going on, and is to be completed by and by; but we are saved and cannot in Christ be more so than we are. Whereas, according to Philippians, Paul himself had not his salvation yet: "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." The perfection there spoken of entirely and solely refers to the time when we shall be changed into the glorious likeness of Christ; then, not before, we shall be saved. If you apply the same sense of salvation to both Epistles, you make the doctrine contradictory. Take again the Epistle to the Hebrews. There, too, salvation is always represented as a future thing. "Wherefore," it is said, "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." God's people are meant, not the unconverted, as coming unto God by Christ. For whom is He a priest? For the believer only. Thus it is the saint that requires to be saved in the Epistle to the Hebrews; because salvation there applies to all the difficulties of our wilderness-journey. The whole doctrine is founded on the type that we are now, like Israel of old, going

through the desert, and have not yet entered into Canaan; whereas, the characteristic teaching of the Ephesians is that Christ has gone into Canaan, and that we are in Him there. It is because we are occupied with a part of the word of God and not the whole, because we see one truth strongly and not the truth generally, that we get confused and faulty views which lead to wrong practice.

The reason of these differences is most interesting. You have exactly in each epistle what is suited to its own character. In Ephesians the revelation is not of Christ as one interceding for us before God: this we have in Hebrews. Why is He a priest? That He may have compassion on the ignorant, and on them which are out of the way. This is exactly, as we journey here below, our danger: we are ignorant, and always exposed to the temptation of slipping aside through an evil heart of unbelief. Therefore we need the Epistle to the Hebrews. The doctrine of Ephesians would not of itself suffice to meet me in my weakness, difficulties, and sorrows. Supposing I had wandered, what is there to recall and comfort my soul in Ephesians? There I read, “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” Nay, but I have gone astray, and I cannot get any relief to my anguish thence. I may try to stay my heart on God’s election and high counsels, but, if I have a tender conscience, these alone will make me more miserable. If God really loved me so much, how comes it (the heart will reason) that I should so dishonour Him? In Hebrews I find nothing at all about my sitting in heavenly places, but Christ at the right hand of God, and pleading for me, after He had by Himself purged my sins. The very first chapter starts with the glorious truth — that Christ took

His seat on high only when He could go there on the ground that He had completely blotted out our sins, and this “by Himself,” i.e., to the exclusion of all other help. It was His own task, and He has accomplished it, and would not rest even in that, to Him, familiar glory, save on this ground. Therein we have a most sure foundation. But although we have the purging of sins through Christ, we are in a place of temptation where, through ignorance, and weakness, and a thousand things that may arise, we are in constant peril of turning aside and slipping. What is to become of us then7 What is to sustain and carry us through? God reveals the blessed Priest who cares for the soul — One who has the full confidence of God the Father — who has given the most entire satisfaction to Him — One who is seated at the right hand of God, and who there is unceasingly occupied with our need, on the ground that we belong to God and are already redeemed, and have no more conscience of sin. We can perhaps hardly make out how it is that persons who are so blessed of God should be so weak and wretched; so little like Him who, at His own cost, has bought and secured us our blessing. But faith receives and asks of God what He intends to be our strength and comfort in the midst of our weakness and dangers. His answer is, that Christ is there to plead our cause, as surely as the Spirit is here to render us sensible of it. And it is through Christ’s intercession at the right hand of God that we are brought to feel our need and failure. For we never judge it, without getting moral blessing through that judgment. All power of Christ resting on us is in proportion to the depth of the moral estimate produced in our souls by the Spirit of God in answer to the intercession of Christ; and it is part of Christ’s intercession for us that we are made to feel,

when we have in mind and fact gone astray. In Hebrews, salvation could not be spoken of as a past thing. We know that we shall be fully saved, and that Christ is coming for it. But although it is appointed unto men to die, it is not necessarily so for the saint. We know that they may never fall asleep, as for certain they will never be judged, though all they have done will be surely manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ. But He has gone through death for them, and therefore there is no necessity that they should die; and He has endured judgment as none other could, and we have His own word for it that into judgment, at any rate, we shall never come. He that believes on the Son of God "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment." (John 5) The consequence is, that though we look for Him to come, we know that when He does appear the second time, it will be without sin unto salvation. He has so perfectly put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, that when He is thus seen the second time by them that look for Him, it will be "without sin" (apart from all question of sin, as far as they are concerned), "unto salvation," and not unto judgment. Salvation and judgment are the two things above all others most in contrast. You cannot have judgment and salvation exercised upon the same individual. In Hebrews, then, you have salvation connected with our Lord's appearing the second time.

In Ephesians, on the contrary, we are saved already, and there Christ's return to receive His people is not throughout referred to. In the Epistles where salvation is said to be consummated by and by, there we have Christ coming to finish it. In Philippians he says, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for

the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." There we have our Lord changing this body of humiliation into the likeness of His glorious body, proving Himself to be the Saviour; because it is not a partial deliverance, but a complete salvation for the whole man. But in Ephesians, where our Lord's coming is never introduced, this links itself with the fact that salvation is already supposed to be an accomplished fact, which we now enjoy. This is a way of looking at salvation rare in Scripture: it is generally looked at as something we have before us. People confound salvation with justification or reconciliation to God; but in Romans the evident distinction is drawn — "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Thus, we have the reconciliation, but not the salvation, in the sense spoken of there. "We shall be saved." He is living for us, and, as a consequence, we are being saved. The salvation is going on; and when Christ comes again in glory, then salvation will be complete. Hence, in Romans 13 we have the doctrine applied again: "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." We have not got it yet; but it is nearer; and we shall have it all perfectly by and by. Before we believed, we were enemies and lost; then, believing, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Now He lives for us; and soon He will come again for us, and then all will be complete.

Again, take Corinthians, and you will find the same teaching there. Salvation is not regarded there as complete. Hence the apostle says that he is keeping

under his body and bringing it into subjection. He will not allow any evil lust to gain the mastery over him. He might preach to all the world; but if evil got the upper hand of him, how could he be saved himself? He puts it in the strongest possible way of his own case; and shows that preaching (of which some apparently thought more than of Christ) has nothing to do with a man's being saved, but life in Christ; for the grace of Christ manifests itself in holy subjection to God and self-judgment of evil. These are the inseparable consequences of having the life of Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost in the soul. "I keep under my body," says he, "lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." This last word I take in the strongest, and, indeed, the only scriptural, sense — i.e., of reprobate. A castaway in the New Testament means not merely that a man was going to lose something, but to lose his own soul and lose Christ. There are no instances in the Epistles where the word is used in a modified sense: it invariably means lost for ever; and it is neither faith nor intelligence to modify its force. It was not that Paul had any fear of being lost; but he transfers the case to himself to make it more energetic, supposing that he were to renounce Christ and holiness. What is the consequence? He might have been ever such a preacher, and yet be a castaway; but no man that ever was regenerate could be a castaway; and so he does not say, Though I were born of God, I might be a castaway. Such a thing could not and might not to be supposed. But he does illustrate most seriously what, alas! has been far too common, that a man might preach to others and be a reprobate. We know that one of the apostles preached and wrought miracles; but the Lord never knew him.

This will show the importance of leaving room for salvation in every way that Scripture looks at it. In the largest part of Scripture it is not regarded after the Ephesian manner, but in the way I have been describing in Romans, etc. No question is fairly raised of falling away when the apostle speaks of salvation in this sense; but the fact is, that all the result of the blessing — all the fulness of the deliverance, is not yet our portion. And who can say that it is? Here we are suffering still: then we shall be out of the scene of temptation altogether. In Ephesians, when looking at the character of our life, he says, it is entirely outside all danger, all temptation, and everything of the sort. “By grace ye are saved.” By this he means that we have been and are saved; that is, we have the present enjoyment of that which is already past and complete before God. It is a fact accomplished, because it is in Christ, and everything here is regarded as being in Christ, as, for instance, our peace. Hence He is called “our peace” further on. Hence, too, so truly is the salvation viewed as being in Christ, that, the Saviour being seated on high, we are said to be (not in process of salvation, but) completely saved, so as to need nothing more as far as this is concerned. In full accordance with this it was added, that God “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” What plainer than the completeness of the salvation? How manifestly it has a character of association with Christ, that is entirely beyond all human conception! It is easy to conceive that such a blessedness might be by and by; but the wonderful thing is, that this could be predicated of poor, weak Christians in the world now. If we dwell much

upon human things, they become cheap and common, and we cease to wonder; but with this glorious work of God in His beloved Son, the more we think of it, the more we stand amazed before it. Observe, too, it is for this very purpose: “that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” That is, it is not merely God looking at us, and giving us what we need, but God acting for the indulgence of His own affections through His Son. God says, as it were, I want to show what I am, not merely to supply what you want. Thus it is God rising up to the height of His own goodness, and acting from what He is, entirely irrespective of what we are, save that we become the occasion for God to show His matchless love; and this, not merely now, but “in the ages to come,” or, as I suppose, for unlimited time.

Nor is this all. There is a fresh guard against certain misconceptions by taking up or repeating the expression, “For by grace are ye saved,” with the addition of “through faith,” a strong confirmation of what has been already said. We are not saved by the electing purpose of God, true and blessed as it is, but through faith in our hearts, through that divine persuasion which the Holy Ghost works in the heart of a man once an unbeliever. “By grace are ye saved through faith.” There is no such thing as God introducing one into the relationship of a child without the action of his heart and conscience. The Holy Ghost gives such a man to feel his own condition as seen of God and yet know what God is toward him in Christ. A cold parchment-deed, mechanical salvation there is not, any more than such a change of the old nature as could be a ground of hope toward God. But if human feeling cannot be

trusted, neither can ever so orthodox a recognition of God's decrees. When God speaks in and of His Son, it is a real thing, and he who hears must more or less deeply have the consciousness of its solemnity. He is no longer unwilling and indifferent to Christ. He may feel sin and hate himself as he never did, just because he is under the hand of God and under the teaching of God. Thus the very thing that you bring to prove that you are not one of God's own, is rather a proof that you are. If you were dead to God, would you feel what grieves Him? It is when Christ has begun to dawn on the soul that you begin to realize that you have been lying in all that is dark and loathsome, though a glimmer of hope may break through the clouds. You are seriously conscious of evil things to which you were insensible before. This is an effect of God's mighty and gracious operation; but there is no such thing as life without faith or with unconsciousness. There will always be something that awakens new thoughts and feelings about God, a fear and a desire after God, a horror of sin, and a hatred of self. All these things and more will pass through the spirit of him that is born of God, and what produces all these feelings by the Spirit of God is Christ — nothing else will. Otherwise a man in vain attends a church or chapel — going to the best or the worst testimony; but he is there on this principle — he thinks it is his duty to attend perhaps every day — it is the notion of a religious service which he thinks he ought to pay to God, and that, if he does it diligently, God will remember him on his death-bed and in the day of judgment. Such is one part of the duty man pays in the hope of escaping hell. But all this goes on the ground of man's putting God under a kind of obligation to himself. Man is doing something because of which he thinks God ought to

show him mercy. What can more flagrantly deny both sin and God's grace? Now, it is "by grace ye are saved, through faith." And the meaning of being saved by grace is by what God is toward me in His Son, apart from a single thing deserving it in me. Are you willing to trust your salvation to God only, in His beloved Son? This is faith. "By grace we are saved through faith." If I mingle a particle of my own, it is properly neither grace nor faith; for faith renounces self for Christ, and grace is God's pure favour to me a sinner on the cross. When I listen to Christ, then the word of God begins to deal with everything in me that is selfish and contrary to God, and I must not attempt to modify or accommodate the word of God to my own thoughts, and thus to make provision for a little indulgence of the flesh.

I maintain, therefore, that the salvation spoken of in Ephesians is already complete for him that believes; so absolute indeed, that none can add anything to it, because it would be adding something to Christ, and to what Christ has done. And this may not be, cannot be, seeing that it is all the free, unmerited, unmingled mercy of God. And this is the great thing for the soul. Am I able, without question of what I am, or what I hope to be, or what I ought to do for God, to trust Him now? Can I rest all that I have been and am upon Christ, without any promises or pledges of mine — without any hope or thought of what I may do, because God might take me away in a moment? Can I rest entirely and implicitly in Him? Think of the case of the dying thief, which is a living and notable testimony of salvation by grace throughout all ages. Others may have a work to do afterwards; but there we have one who was an object of grace in the last hours of his life. And there is no other

way. Had he lived for a thousand years afterwards, he would not have been a whit more secure by grace than he was then. It is of great moment to bring our souls to the touchstone from time to time — whether we are resting solely upon the grace of God toward us, not upon what people call grace in us, i.e., our faithfulness toward Him. For this is a common notion of grace. They mean a great change that has taken place in the heart in respect of God. This, however, is not what God calls grace, but what He has given gratuitously in the work that Christ has done for sin. “By grace are ye saved through faith.” The Spirit shuts out all thought of man’s contributing the faith or taking any credit because coming to Christ; for He says immediately after, “And that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” This probably refers, not only to the salvation, but to the faith; it was all the gift of God, and not man’s production: “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” On the contrary, instead of being a question of our works, we are God’s handiwork, the new creation for His own praise. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” There you have a most plain proof that there could be no carelessness as to the walk of the believer; but the same verse cuts off all thought that man’s doing can be the ground or means of salvation.

Here, then, we have the believer the workmanship of God in Christ, and this “unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” This is a very remarkable expression, and one that we cannot too much weigh. It is not the good works of the law — not those which might seem so in human judgment, but an offering of a new character, heavenly and of grace,

which was in God's mind and all determined about us before the scene existed into which we are now brought. The same God who had a purpose of saving us and blessing us with Christ before the world was made, had a certain line of walk, a special course of action, in which He expected the recipients of such favour to walk. It is not the thought of the good we ought to do as men, as a means of showing that we are willing to obey God under the law. It is not loving God, and one's neighbour as oneself simply, but another type and display of love altogether. It flows from our new relationships, and if it be exercised in loving God and loving those around us, it is according to the rich love which God Himself has shown us in Christ. It is not merely duty, let it be the very highest form of obligation. If a man were to walk merely in this, though ever so well, he would fall short of what a Christian ought to be, and they are not the "good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." The law was brought in by Israel's presumption and self-conceit; it was not something that God had before ordained for His people to walk in. Therefore it is said in Romans, that law came in by the way (πρεισῆλθεν). It was a thing that entered incidentally, as a sort of parenthesis brought in for a special but very momentous purpose. And it has done its work, and the believer, even if he had been under it, is brought clear out of it and made alive to God. He has a new husband, and is dead to the old one. But here the truth is put in a very beautiful form, in harmony with the character of the whole epistle. As the calling and the purpose and all that God thought about us were before the world was, so even the character of the believer's walk was ordained before ever we came into the world and is in its own nature entirely above it. It is a question

of our manifesting God aright, as He is now displaying Himself. “Be ye followers of God as dear children.”

What a wonderful place is this that we are put into! We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them. We have a new character of life altogether that the law never contemplated, and we have a correspondingly new character of good works.

Here opens a very distinct section of the epistle. It is not God’s thoughts of grace unfolded, reaching forth from before the world’s foundation unto the inheritance of glory, when all things shall be subjected to Christ, the Church being one with Him in His supremacy over them all. Neither again is it the means whereby God takes up souls that were dead under the power of Satan and by nature children of wrath, one as much as another, quickening them with Christ, raising them up and making them sit together in Him in heavenly places. We have had this in the earlier part of chapter 2. But now we have the present working of the plans of God in the world. Ephesians 1 gave us the counsels of God about them; Ephesians 2:1-10, the way in which He wrought in them; but now we have the manner of His plans upon the earth. Accordingly, this brings into very distinct relief the condition in which man had been before. There had been already dealings of God here below. After the flood, when the whole world had departed from God, and set up a new form of peculiarly malignant evil — the worship of false gods, the true God called out one man into a place of separation from all others, and made him to be the depository of His promises and testimony upon the earth. This was Abraham, and Abraham’s seed. Accordingly there it was that from the call of Abraham

we find the scene of the workings of God's power, goodness, and government, though government was afterwards severed, because of Israel's hopeless evil, and handed over to the Gentiles. But the cross of Christ terminated these trials. God might linger for many years after, as we know, in forbearance, but the fate of the Jewish nation was sealed in the cross of Christ; and from that very moment God began to bring out these much deeper purposes of His love. For the Jewish people, at the very best even, had they been converted and received the Messiah, could never have been more here below than an earthly people. They might have been regenerate, but they must have been earthly. The promises that were so fully and richly accorded them in the Old Testament had to do with the earth. I do not say that faith had nothing deeper, or that there was not in the hidden mind of God something outside this present scene. But, let me say again, they were an earthly people; they had the "earthly things" of the kingdom by the distinct gift of God; and it is in reference to this very circumstance, that God declares that His gifts and calling are without repentance. He had given earthly blessings to the Jews, and He had called them out for the purpose of enjoying the land. It will be in a condition of glory under their Messiah. He will never repent of His purpose, nor withdraw His gift. But meanwhile the whole history of Israel's rejection of God has come in; their worshipping of idols, and finally the crucifixion of their own Messiah; and for the time being they are dispossessed of their land, and scattered over the face of the earth.

But during the time of the dispersion of Israel, and even before it began, from the moment that their guilt was

consummated, this heavenly purpose of God was gradually manifested upon the earth. But we must remember that the Church, besides being the object of God's eternal counsels, and having a glorious portion in heaven along with Christ, for which we are waiting, has also an existence upon earth, and enters into the dealings of God here below. This is the point at which we are arrived in this epistle. We have had the deeper thoughts of God; but as the epistle does touch upon the ways of God on the earth, we should not have had a full view of the Church's place if it did not give us the dispensational succession here below. Accordingly we have the elements which compose the Church: "Wherefore remember that ye being in times past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands." Here we are on totally different ground. It is no longer "children of wrath," persons that were by nature one as bad and dead as the other; but here men are distinguished on earth — the uncircumcision on the one hand, and the circumcision on the other. So that you are on earthly ground, the ground of dispensational dealings, where you have God separating one part of mankind from another by His own will; not because the one was better than the other, but for the display of His own wisdom and purpose. The great mass of the Jews were just as evil in the sight of God as the Gentiles; and some of the Gentiles were converted, such as Job, while there were many of the Jews that perished in their sins. But for all that, God did put a difference between Jew and Gentile; and He says, "Remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh." You were among the rest of mankind, left out of the call of God; you were not brought into a place of separate witness for God as

Abraham was; you are called the uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision. “At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.” They had no part in the polity of God set up in Israel; and they were “strangers from the covenants of promise.” God gave glorious promises in the form of a covenant, and bound Himself to accomplish them. The Gentiles had no part nor lot in them. There were promises about Gentiles, but none to them. Israel were the direct parties concerned in the promises — they, and they only. And we must carefully remember what these promises meant. They were not made to Abel or Enoch, much less to Adam and Eve, though it is common to speak of the promise made in the garden of Eden. But Scripture never talks of promise there. And if you examine Genesis 3, you will find the wisdom of God in this; for it could be in no sense a promise. To whom could it be a promise? To whom was it uttered? To that old serpent. No believer could imagine a promise to him. It was a threat of the extinction of his power. God was judging the sin which had just entered the world: is this the suited time when promises are made? It is strictly a revelation of God, not in the form of a promise at all, but a declaration which comes out in denouncing judgment upon the serpent, and which showed that the Seed of the woman was to bruise his head.

“The promises,” then, do not go up higher than Abraham: they are connected with the dispensations of God. It may be asked; Have we not promises? I answer, We have all the promises of God; but how and where? They are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. If we have Christ, we are Abraham’s seed, and inheritors of the promises, though in a way totally differing from that in

which the Jews had them of old or will have them by and by. We come in on the ground of pure mercy, and as altogether outside covenant. There is no such thing as a covenant with the Church, or with us Gentiles. I do not mean that we receive not the blessings that are in the new covenant: we have all that is blessed in it, and better too; but not as Israel. They come under them as subjects of the promises of God; whereas we are sought, and reached, and blessed by sovereign grace — having a title to nothing, and yet some better thing provided for us. We come in as filling up the gap between the rejection of the Messiah and His reception by Israel by and by; and we form part of this parenthesis, rather than of the dealings of God here below, in a very interesting manner, as I hope to show.

Here, then, the difference is first brought out. He wants us to know what was our condition. We have right to nothing; we have not the smallest claim upon God; we had no such prescriptive place conferred upon us as Israel had through the promises. They had a place even as unconverted men in the world; and the day is coming when, being converted, they will have a signally conspicuous position in the world, an earthly distinction and glory which never was and never will be our portion. Do not suppose that we shall not have far better, but we shall never have such a place on the earth. We shall have one with Christ over all things; but it will not be while we have our natural life here below. It is in the resurrection-state that the Church’s glory is destined to be brought out, in all its fulness, as far as manifested to the world. So that here the Ephesian saints are reminded of what their condition had been as Gentiles: “At that time ye were without Christ, being

aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." They had no hope They were not expecting any divine intervention to deliver them on the earth: they might dream of what people dream still — a perfectibility of man upon the earth. They had no connection with God in the world; whereas the Jews had Him to direct all their movements — how they were to live and how their inheritances were to be settled. God entered into all their domestic affairs as well as their worship: everything was entirely under the distinct ordinance of God. If they had God thus in the world, the Gentiles knew nothing of the sort. Out of this miserable condition, what are we brought into? Into the position that Israel had? That is treated of elsewhere. In Romans 11 the great point is to show that the natural branches of the olive tree were broken off, that we who were wild branches might be graffed in. The subject there is not the Church, but merely the possession of promises, and the place of testimony to God here below. These are distinct things. Every baptized person — that is, every one who outwardly professes Christ — belongs to the olive. All such have a special responsibility, as not being heathen (nor Jews either), but in possession of the oracles of God, and as bearing the name of Christ in an outward manner. But in Ephesians 2 there is a far deeper line: the apostle treats of the body of Christ and the assembly of God. And we must remember, that at the beginning of Christianity these two things closely approached each other: in other words, the assembly consisted of hardly any others than the members of Christ's body, true believers united to Christ by the Holy Ghost. But soon individuals crept in, not born of God, and of course not members of Christ, who nevertheless

entered the assembly of God. Thus, by a Christian now is meant one who is not a Pagan nor a Jew. Hence, in Romans 11, you read of branches being cut off; hence the branches that are grafted in are said to stand in the goodness of God, and warned to continue in it, lest they also should be cut off. It is a question of profession, of its danger, and its sure doom if faithless. But in Ephesians there is no such thing as cutting off, because there the main subject is the membership of the body of Christ. Some now talk of not rending the body of Christ; but there is no such phrase or idea in Scripture. You will find passages that insist much upon the firm standing of true believers, and others which warn of professors coming to nothing of themselves or being judged of God. There is no such thought as cutting off a member of Christ's body. There are solemn warnings to Christians for preserving them from evil, but no such a thing as their insecurity.

Proceeding with the chapter, the positive side of the question appears. The Gentiles did not possess the privileges of the Jews by nature "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one" — both Jew and Gentile — "and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." There we have it plainly set forth that the very institutions God set up in His dealings with the Jews are now cast down. God Himself has destroyed the middle wall of partition. He alone is competent so to do. It would have been a sin for any one else to have attempted it. On the other hand, you will find persons who, in their ignorance of Scripture, will argue that, because God had commanded these things once, He must sanction them always.

Nothing can be more unfounded. It is entirely limiting God, and shutting their eyes to the plainest statements of His word. Throughout a large part of the New Testament God Himself sets aside the Jewish institution, in all its parts. Doubtless there are moral principles that were true before the law — revealed ways of God from the first, that always must regulate man's conduct with God; but these have nothing necessarily to do with the law. Under the legal institution they might be more or less embodied into the law and take the shape of commandments; but their roots lie far deeper than the law given to Moses. It is founded upon this misconception, that when you speak of the Christian's deliverance from the law, some think you are going to destroy morality, and overthrow God's holy standard of good and evil. But it does not become us to judge what is most for the glory of God. Humility is found in, and proved by, obedience; and obedience depends on subjection to the word of God. The same act in different circumstances is a duty or a crime: the only unerring test for the believer is God's word. It was a sin in the Jews not to destroy all the Canaanites: God commanded them to do so — the only One competent to judge, and entitled to command of His sovereign will. For a Christian now to do the same thing would be to mistake His mind. The world is bound to deal with murderers as stringently now as ever: God has not revoked in any wise the word He uttered as to the sanctity of human life. That is what God had set up long before the law of Moses, or any distinction between Jews and Gentiles. It is annulled neither by the law given to Israel, nor by the gospel that now flows out in grace to the world. Government among men stands upon its own foundation and was involved in the commission given to Noah; but

the Christian is outside and above it all. He is called unto a new calling and this we have here. “Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Our task is not the preservation of the world’s order or the punishment of its disorder; but a new building grows up on the blessed, holy, divine ground of the blood of Christ, by which we are brought nigh to God. Nor is it only what we shall be by and by, but what we are now. We “are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

Nothing can be more distinct, “For He is our peace;” a most wonderful expression. Our peace is not merely a thing of enjoyment within us, but it is Christ outside us; and if souls only rested upon this, would there be anxiety as to fulness of peace? It is my own fault entirely if I do not rest in and enjoy it. But even so; am I to doubt that Christ is my peace? I am dishonouring Him if I do. If I had a surety whose riches could not fail, why should I doubt my standing or credit? It depends neither on my wealth, nor on my poverty: all turns on the resources of him who has become responsible for me. So it is with Christ. He is our peace, and there can be no possibility of failure in Him. Where the heart confides in this, what is the effect? Then we can rest and enjoy. How can I enjoy a blessing before I believe it? And I must begin with believing before I enjoy. The Lord in His grace does give His people betimes transports of joy; but joy may fluctuate. Peace is or should be a permanent thing: that the Christian is entitled to have always; and this because Christ is our peace. He is not called our joy, nor God the God of joy, but of peace, because He Himself has done it: and it rests entirely upon Christ. “He is our peace who

hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."

There prevails a notion (unknown to the Bible) that Christ was making out our righteousness when He was here below. Now the life of Christ was, I do not question, necessary to vindicate God and His holy law, as well as to manifest Himself and His love; but the righteousness that we are made in Christ is another thought altogether — not the law fulfilled by Him, but the justifying righteousness of God founded on Christ's death, displayed in His resurrection, and crowned by His glory in heaven. It is not Christ simply doing our duty for us, but God forgiving my trespasses, judging my sin, yea, finding such satisfaction in Christ's blood that now He cannot do too much for us; it becomes, if I may so say, a positive debt to Christ, because of what Christ has suffered. It is not seen that the law is the strength of sin, not of righteousness. Had Christ only kept the law, neither your soul nor mine could have been saved, much less blessed, as we are. Whoever kept the law, it would have been the righteousness of the law, and not God's righteousness which has not the smallest connection with obeying the law. It is never so treated in the word of God. Because Christ obeyed unto death, God has brought in a new kind of righteousness — not ours, but His own in our favour. Christ has been made a curse upon the tree; God has made Him sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Were the common doctrine on this subject true, we might expect it to be said, He obeyed the law for us, that we might have legal righteousness imputed or transferred to us. Whereas the truth is in all points contrasted with such ideas. Surely Christ's obeying the law was not

God's making Him sin. So, in the passage that is so often used, "by His obedience many are made righteous." How is His obedience here connected with the law? The apostle does introduce the law in the next verse, as a new and additional thing, coming in by the way.

Further, Adam would not have known the meaning of "the law," though undoubtedly he was under a law which he broke. What, for instance, could Adam in his innocence have made of the word, "Thou shalt not lust," or covet? No such feeling was within his experience. Accordingly, as we see, it was only after man was fallen that the law in due time was given to condemn the outbreak of sin. But Christ has died for and under sin — our sin. And what is the consequence? All believers now, whether Jews or Gentiles, in Christ Jesus are brought into an entirely new place. The Gentile is brought out of his distance from God; the Jew out of his dispensational nearness; both enjoy a common blessing in God's presence never possessed before. The old separation dissolves and gives place by grace to oneness in Christ Jesus. When did this begin? An important question, for it is really the answer to the question: — What, according to Scripture, is the Church? Ask many of God's children. Would they not say, The aggregate of all believers? But is this the body of Christ as shown us here? There were saints from the beginning, all who were born of God; but were they formed into an united assembly on the earth? Did anything under the Old Testament correspond to one body? It never was heard of, excepting as a thing promised, till the day of Pentecost. It awaited the cross of Christ. Therein God abolished the enmity. Before that God had commanded the Jew to be apart from the Gentile; and our Lord maintained it most strenuously

when He was upon earth. He forbade His disciples to go into any city of the Gentiles. He told the woman of Syrophenicia that He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. She had gone on the ground of promises, but He shows her that she had no part or lot in the promises. Had she addressed Him as Son of God, would our Lord have kept her waiting? She appealed to Him as the Son of David; and as such His connection was with Israel. She had to learn the mistake of going on the ground of promises that she had no title to. And this is often the reason why people do not enjoy peace. They plead God's promises; but what if I cannot say that they are promises to me? Need I wonder that the answer tarries? Hence, too, there is in general little solid peace. How well for the poor woman, how well for us to know and confess what we really are! She owns that she was not a child nor a sheep at all. "Yet the dogs eat!" She sees why it was that she could not get what she wanted on the false ground of privileges she did not possess. She is brought to own herself as having no promises at all; and then there is no limit to the blessing in the grace of Christ. "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

The two instances in which the Lord admires the faith of those who came to Him were of Gentiles — the centurion and the Syrophenician. Our Lord cannot gainsay His love, and they knew it. They pressed their suit consequently. It was in the midst of dense ignorance: but then the eye was single in the main, and the object on which it rested was a blesser beyond all thought. The blessing consequently could not be lost, and though it might be delayed, it was infinite.

So in this epistle we have the Gentile in a most deplorable condition of distance from God, and separation from all that God had chosen upon the earth. But the cross of Christ has annihilated all such distinctions. It has proved that the favoured Jew was, if possible, more iniquitous than the poor Gentile. They had rejected and crucified their own Messiah; and if there were any among the Jews more urgent for His death than others, it was the priests; and so it always is. There is nothing so heartless as the religion of this world; and if it was so then, still more now. What so bad under the sun as a spurious Christianity? It may be fair-spoken, and have a good deal of truth mingled with it; but it is without a purged conscience and without divine affection; and the more fearful will be its end. We need take care what we sanction at the present hour: the time is short. The Lord has brought out what His Church is. The will of man has raked up the law of commandments out of the grave of Christ, and enacts it over again. This is what is found throughout all Christendom. It is inconceivable, except through realizing the power of Satan, how Christians can take up the peculiar institutions of God to His people, curses and all, in the face of such a chapter as this, where we find that all this is gone, even for Jews who believe, by the authority of God. It is a practical denial of the blood and cross of Christ. What a solemn proof of the ruined state of the Church of God! The truth is plain indeed: “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.” To this figure of one new man Christians answer. You will find

that such a state of things never was known during the Old Testament times, nor even during our Lord's life on earth. It is only after the ascension that Jew and Gentile are united upon earth, and worship God on the same level. This is the Church. It is not merely that they are all believers, but they are members of Christ and of one another on earth. Of course, when we get to heaven, it will still be the Church; but it begins here, and that with Christ crucified and ascended to heaven. When He thus takes His place there, the work follows of forming the body in union with the Head. All distinction is gone, as far as its own sphere is concerned. The nature of the Church is most plain from this: "That he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" — which enmity was in the commandments of the law, which straitly and wholly separated one from the other.

But Christ "came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them which were nigh." All is attributed to Him, because founded on the cross; and it is Christ, by the Holy Ghost, who now proclaims this heavenly peace to the Gentiles once afar off, as well as to the hitherto favoured Israel. Where this truth is unknown, men may preach Christ more or less, may be descanting much in general on the promises of God; but a Jew would do that; and to them especially it will be given by and by to sing the song that "the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever" — the great burden of the millennial Psalms. The practically Jewish position taken by most Christians makes them turn the Psalms of David into the staple of Christian communion, and the expression of their own condition before God. All Scripture is, of course, given of God for the profit and blessing of the

Christian. But am I to offer a bull and a goat, because of old it was commanded? To imitate Leviticus is one thing; to understand it is quite another. “By faith we establish the law,” but we are not under it. So, speaking about my walk as a Christian, St. Paul says that sin shall not have dominion over me, for I am not under law, but under grace. How sad to see that the Evangelicals as a body now diligently preach the contrary! They may preach a measure of truth about other things, but they cannot preach the gospel, and they deny the Church of God. A Christian is under the law for nothing whatever, because he is under Christ dead and risen. Christ was under it once; but then I had nothing to say to Him. He passed out of it on the cross; and my association with Christ begins thenceforward. I am united with Christ in heaven, not on the earth. What has Christ in heaven to do with the law? Hence we are said to be under grace, not under law. Further, this doctrine is most practical. The walk is amazingly lowered where a mistake is made about it; and Satan tries to bring in the law after believing, if he cannot pervert it to hinder believing.

Here, then, it is peace that is preached “to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” There, instead of the law, which drew a distinction between Jew and Gentile, the Holy Ghost unites them on a common ground, and puts them in a common relationship as sons, having to do with the Father. This is our position. When God was acting as a governor, He chose a nation, He had His own servants. But now, when He has a family, all that order of things vanishes. He has His children, and wants to have them near Him. The end of all the Jewish forms of holy places and days, of

priesthood and of sacrifice, was the cross of Christ. God has fully tried and given up any working upon men by a religion that is visible, or by sight and sounds that act upon the senses. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven leads the children of God to draw near to the Father. How can a Christian acknowledge that this is what God has given to guide him, and yet be found taking part, were it only by his presence, in that which is positively Jewish? What God has provided for the Jew, and what He enjoins upon the Christian, are very different things. We are not Jews but Christians. What He presses upon Christians is far more cutting to nature and more honouring to Christ than anything that He ever did or will give to Israel. He has brought us as His family to Himself, and through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto the Father — we both — Jew and Gentile. How far are we carrying it out? Are we to sanction the unbelief that turns back to the weak and beggarly elements of the world? or are we cleaving only to Christ, worshipping God in the Spirit? We may suffer, if faithful to grace and truth; but happy are we, if it be so.

He adds further, “Now, therefore, ye [Gentiles] are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” They were brought out of all that condition of distance, and made part of His household, “and are built upon the foundation” — not of the law — but “of the apostles and prophets.” What prophets? Of the New Testament only. God was not taking up an old foundation, but laying down a new one; and this new one He begins in Christ dead and risen. It is the foundation, not of the prophets and apostles, but “of the apostles and prophets.” The phrase in Greek means that both classes, the apostles

and prophets, were united in this joint work. They were together employed in laying this common basis. We read (Eph. 3:5) of the mystery of Christ, “which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” These words set aside all controversy; for they prove that it is a question only of the present. So in Ephesians 4:11, “He gave some apostles and some prophets.” Some of the New Testament writers were not apostles, and yet they were just as much inspired. We are said, then, to be built upon this “foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.” It is not merely prophecy or promise, but “Jesus Christ Himself” — His Person. It is what the Apostle Peter learned from the lips of our Lord: “Upon this rock I will build my Church;” that is, upon the confession of Christ as the Son of the living God. And so here you have Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. But it is not here, as in Matthew, Christ building; but these apostles and prophets are used (of course subordinately) because they were the instruments of revealing the Church. Thus Scripture confines the Church to that which followed the death and resurrection of Christ, and makes it depend on the Holy Ghost sent down to form them into one body upon earth. “In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.” It is not yet complete. “In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” God had once a dwelling-place on earth — the temple; and there He dwelt, not by the Spirit, but in a visible manner. Now God dwells on earth in a more blessed way still, even through the Spirit. The Holy Ghost constitutes the saints the divine habitation and unites them as one body. He

dwells in the Church, making it thus the temple of God. It is not His indwelling in the individual that we have here. This also is most true and important; but, besides, He dwells in the Church: He makes the Church to be God’s dwelling-place. What a truth! It is plain that God looks for it, that we should be walking faithfully in the truth, and according to Christ.

Ephesians 3

We have here a remarkable instance of the parenthetical style of the epistle; for the whole chapter on which we are entering is an example of it. We shall find parenthesis within parenthesis, the want of seeing which increases the misunderstanding of the epistle; but once observed, all is easy, and the moral fitness of such a form of describing what is in itself a sort of parenthesis in God's ways has been and should be noticed by the way. We can seek, by the grace of God, to learn and consider the reason for these digressions, which form an episode of unusual length. The whole of Ephesians 3 comes in between the doctrine of the close of Ephesians 2 and the exhortation at the beginning of Ephesians 4, which is founded upon that doctrine. What is the meaning of this turning aside? The Holy Ghost stops short in the midst of the unfolding of the doctrine to lead us into — what? The answer, I think, is very plain. He has just alluded to that which must have seemed a great stumbling-block to a Jew; namely, God's forming one body, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Among many Christians now, I am sorry to say, the difficulty is not even felt, still less is the truth understood. The reason is, because they have so little hold of the faithfulness or the purposes of God. For it is a real trial of faith to a devout mind, when one part of the truth of God appears to clash with another. There cannot be any real discord; all must be in perfect keeping and harmony. But we are not always able to understand how the different parts of truth hang together. While thus ignorant, we ought to wait in faith,

neither doubting on the one hand nor indifferent on the other.

Let us for a moment seek to put ourselves in the position of the Jewish believers, who inherited the thoughts and feelings and prejudices of the Old Testament saints. And let such an one have words of this kind clearly pressed upon him — one body, neither Jew nor Gentile, the enmity slain, the middle wall of partition broken down. What a truth for a Jew! How extraordinary that God should destroy that which He had been building up, and had so long sanctioned; that God who had formed and insisted on the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, on peril even of death to those slighting them — that He Himself should reduce them to nothing, and bring in what is totally different from and irreconcileable with the old order! No wonder all this should be a difficulty, if put together as the mind of God for the same time. But there is a key to the whole enigma. They are not instituted of God contemporaneously. Hence all the difficulty amounts to, is, that God, who at one time ordained the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles, is pleased now for a season to abolish it and to bring in an entirely new thing. Now the early part of Ephesians 3 is devoted to the explaining of this special part of the mystery of Christ, whereby the Gentiles are brought forward and put upon exactly the same level with the believing Jews who now received Christ, so that in this world they form one and the same body. But the more that a man adhered to the truth of the law and prophets, the more insuperably hard this was, because the Old Testament never speaks of such a state of things. In fact, for a person who only knew the ancient Hebrew revelations, it was a wrench without precedent, and that

for which he must have been altogether unprepared. There was the difficulty of apparently going contrary to the plain word of God. This it is, accordingly, that the Holy Ghost here removes out of the way. And first of all, observe the wisdom of God in laying an admirable foundation for the bringing in of the new doctrine. We have seen the counsels of God from all eternity centring in Christ, and embracing the glorious thought of souls gathered out from this world to be the sharers of the same love and glory in which Christ is now found in the presence of God. (Eph. 1) Next, we had the means employed to meet souls in their ruined state upon earth; this we had in Ephesians 2. And now in Ephesians 3 we have a digression for the purpose of explaining fully the nature of this part of the mystery in special relation to Gentiles.

We must, however, guard against the notion that “the mystery” or secret means the gospel. The gospel in itself does not and never can mean a mystery. It was that which in its foundations always was before the mind of God’s people in the form of promise, or of a revelation of grace not yet accomplished. But nowhere in Scripture is the gospel called a mystery. It may be connected with the mystery, but it is not itself a mystery. It was no mystery that a Saviour was to be given; it was the very first revelation of grace after man became a sinner. The Seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent’s head. A mystery is something that was not revealed of old, and which could not be known otherwise. Again, you have in the prophets a full declaration that the righteousness of God was near to come; the plainest possible statement that God was going to show Himself a Saviour-God. So again you have His making an end of sins and bringing

in reconciliation and everlasting righteousness. All these things were in no sense the mystery. The mystery means that which was kept secret, not that which could not be understood, which is a human notion of mystery; but an unrevealed secret, — a secret not yet divulged in the Old Testament but brought out fully in the New. What, then, is this mystery? It is, first, that Christ, instead of taking the kingdom, predicted by the prophets, should completely disappear from the scene of this world, and that God should set Him up in heaven at His own right hand as the Head of all glory, heavenly and earthly, and that He should give the whole universe into the hands of Christ to administer the kingdom and maintain the glory of God the Father in it. This is the first and most essential part of the mystery, the second, or Church's part, being but the consequence of it. Christ's universal headship is not the theme spoken of in the Old Testament. You have Him as Son of David, Son of man, Son of God, the King; but nowhere is the whole universe of God (but rather the kingdom under the whole heavens) put under Him. In this headship over all things, Christ will share all with His bride. Christ will have His Church the partner of His own unlimited dominion, when that day of glory dawns upon the world.

Hence, then, as we know, the mystery consists of two great parts, which we have summed up in Ephesians 5:32; "This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Thus the mystery means neither Christ nor the Church alone, but Christ and the Church united in heavenly blessedness and dominion over everything that God has made. Hence, as we saw from Ephesians 1, when He was raised from the dead, God set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far

above all principality, and power, and might, “and put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church.” It is not said, “over the church,” which would overthrow, not teach, the mystery. He will be over Israel and over the Gentiles, but nowhere is He said to reign over the Church. The Church is His body. I admit it is a figure, but a figure that conveys an intense degree of intimacy, full of the richest comfort and the most exalted hope. The saints who are now being called are to share all things along with Christ in that day of glory. Hence it becomes of the greatest interest to know what the nature of the Church is. When did its calling begin, and what is the character of that calling, what the responsibilities that flow from it?

The Epistle to the Ephesians is the capital seat of the doctrine of the Church; and if the Spirit of God here departs from the current of the doctrine, it is to give us a view of what was one of the chief difficulties connected with it; viz., the Gentile believers being brought with believing Jews into the unity of Christ’s body. A Jewish mind would not feel it so strange that God should bless a Gentile; but he would suppose that the blessing must be inferior to that of a Jew — that a higher place must be reserved for Israel and a lower one for the Gentile. The doctrine now brought out overturns all this. To a mind bred in Old Testament thought it was the apparent undermining of the plain word of God. How was so natural and strong an objection to be removed? It was a new thing for heaven, during Israel’s rejection for the earth. Further, it is from not understanding “the mystery,” and what the Church really is, that the Popish or antichurch system has sprung up. But not only so:

Protestants too have departed from the word of God on this subject through unbelief of our heavenly relationship to Christ and through love of the world — love of present honour and worldly greatness. They have not the faith and patience to wait for the day of Christ. A Christian is called upon to suffer now, to be cast out as evil, waiting to be glorified with Christ — not merely by Christ, but with Christ, to be with Christ Himself where He is. This supposes our place “without the camp,” i.e., every form of worldly religion. Does not the world now take the place of being the Church of God? This is the part of Babylon; and though the strongest expression, and the centre, if you will, of Babylon be found in Popery, that system of confusion is not confined to Rome. We do well to come nearer home, to examine what we are about ourselves, to look whether we be not drawn away into a grave misunderstanding of what God has saved us for. Do Christians generally realize that they are saved at all? Are they simply, thoroughly, abidingly happy in the consciousness of God’s salvation? Look at the hymns that are sung — think of the prayers that are offered. They are the aspirations of anxious, uneasy souls, who call themselves miserable sinners, because they have no conscious possession of the blessing, but only desires after it. Is it possible that it comes to this, that souls count it humility to doubt God? that it is a becoming and boasted part of the worship of God to express the misery and the bondage of redeemed souls on the day which proclaims that their sins are blotted out and their peace made? Where, in all this, is the simple, hearty rest in the knowledge of redemption as a completed thing? of sins being entirely done with for the Christian, as far as regards the judgment of God? Assuredly there remains always the need of our

acknowledging our sins, and of judging ourselves; but this is quite another kind of judgment and of confession, the confession of souls which blame themselves so much the more because they have not a doubt that they are sons of God — hearts which are perfectly at peace and which express their happiness in songs of praise and thanksgiving to the God who has for ever saved them.

Upon the foundation of salvation as a complete thing, the Holy Ghost leads on to the understanding of the Church. If you do not know and rest in Christ's redemption as accomplished, yea, and accepted for us of God, you cannot have a single true idea of the Church. This shows the exceeding wisdom of the Spirit of God in bringing in the doctrine of the Church here, after all question of salvation has been fully met and settled. "For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." He was a sufferer even to bonds for the sake of the Gentiles. Wherever a person takes his place truly as a member of the body of Christ, how can he have honour, or escape reproach and trial in the world? The proper home of the Church is in heaven; but on earth he who brought out this blessed truth is content to be a prisoner. "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward." Dispensation here means "administration" or "stewardship" — that for which he was held responsible to God. The Apostle Paul was the instrument chosen of God for bringing out the nature, calling, character, and hopes of the Church. Mark the ways of God. He would not develop it among the Jews, nor would He reveal it by Peter or James. It was revealed to them no doubt, but not by them. The Apostle Paul was the only one of the inspired writers by whom God made it known. Hence if

there were the smallest truth in apostolic succession, Paul ought to be the root or channel through whom the succession comes, and not Peter, who was expressly an apostle of the circumcision. Paul's apostleship was directly from the Lord and with the uncircumcision as its sphere. He was the grand witness that all true ministry must be direct from Christ. The Lord may work by means. He may call a person to preach, and there may be persons whose gift is developed by means of teaching. The same apostle who derived his gift from the Lord, and who insisted upon it so strongly, used to teach others. He communicated the truth to Timothy, who again was enjoined to teach others that which he had himself received. The Lord works by those who understand the truth well, to communicate the truth to those who understand it less. But still the principle remains, that all gift is immediately from Christ, and not derivative from man. There were outward and local appointments, such as elders and deacons; but that was another thing altogether. The elder might teach or not, and might do so formally and publicly, if he were a teacher; but his eldership was purely a certain charge communicated by the authority of the apostles, distinct from the question of gift. I only refer to the underived character of gift properly so called, which the Spirit distributes in the Church. It comes immediately from Christ on high (Eph. 4), and not through a human channel, save in an exceptional and miraculous instance, as when the apostle laid hands on Timothy and imparted a χαρισμα to him according to prophecy.

In this further statement the Apostle Paul says, "By revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in a few words, whereby, when ye read, ye

may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.)" He had touched upon it in Ephesians 2, but now he is entering upon it more fully. "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men." Here you have a positive statement that the secret was a something not revealed in other ages — not that it was obscurely intimated or badly understood, but it was not revealed at all. It was a secret kept hid, as the apostle lets us know in Romans 16. "Now to him that is of power to stablish you..... according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest." It was only now divulged. It was not that the thing had been predicted by the prophets, and only now laid hold of by faith. In truth it was now made manifest, now published and taught; it never had been before. "But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." There is no doubt that the "scriptures of the prophets," alluded to here, are New Testament scriptures. It is, properly speaking, "by prophetic scriptures," not referring to Old Testament prophets at all; and for this reason — "Now is made manifest, and by prophetic scriptures..... made known to all nations." Had the meaning been Old Testament prophets, what could have been more extraordinary than such an expression? He might have said, It was revealed to the prophets, but now it is understood. But he says, It is now made manifest. "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." There were inspired men, not apostles, who were prophets. To both of these it was now revealed; but we cannot say that "prophetic

scriptures" in Romans 16 extend beyond the writings of Paul, which develop this blessed secret of God. The unfolding of the Church ensued when the Holy Ghost was given after a new manner. "The Holy Ghost was not yet [given] because that Jesus was not yet glorified." The Holy Ghost had wrought before, but He was to be poured out personally; and this is identified with the calling of the Church. At Pentecost, for the first time, we have an assembly that is called the Church of God. "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." There we find what is called the Church, or the assembly: a body where God intended to have Jew and Gentile without distinction; which state of things never existed before the day of Pentecost. And now we have Jews and Gentiles brought into this new order, new to both of them, to which the former revelations of God no longer applied as a direct description of their privileges.

And here let me warn you to beware of so taking the Scriptures as if everything God says there is about you and me and the Church. The Church is, comparatively, a new thing in the earth; it is exclusively a New Testament subject. If I said that saints were thus new, it were false; but if you say that the Church embraces Old Testament saints, you neglect and oppose the word of God, which confines the Church of God to that which began with Christ set at the right hand of God, and the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to baptize all who now believe into this one body. What is meant by "the church?" The assembly of souls gathered by the knowledge of Christ dead and risen, and by the Holy Ghost united to Christ, as the glorified man at God's right hand. Such a state of things did not exist before Pentecost. There was no redemption accomplished before the cross. Christ stands

alone as Son of God from all eternity — a divine person equal with the Father. But He became man in order to die for men upon the cross; and risen from the dead, He enters upon His new place of headship to the Church, His body; the Bridegroom of the Bride. Atonement has been made and sin put away by the sacrifice of Himself; and there could be no such thing as becoming a member of the body of Christ till this was accomplished. The Church is founded upon the remission of sins by the blood of Christ already shed, and consists of those that are united with Christ to share all His glory, save that which is essentially and eternally His own as only-begotten Son of the Father.

Then comes in this especial part of the mystery — "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." The promises of God to Abraham, and this promise of God in Christ, are two things not only different but contrasted. For if I look at the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, "I will make of thee a great nation," is this the Church's expectation? When Christians become great in the earth, it is when they have slipped out of their proper blessing in fellowship with Christ; but when Israel is made a great nation in the true sense of the word, they will be blessed and a blessing as they never were before. The promise was given to Abraham, and will be accomplished in his seed on earth by and by. "I will make of thee a great nation..... and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Here you have room left for the going out of blessing to the Gentiles; but, mark, they are to be blessed in Abraham, and afterwards in his seed. In Genesis 22, the promise is renewed to Isaac; and this is what is referred

to in Hebrews. “By myself I have sworn, saith the Lord..... That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.” Is this what we are looking for? I trow not. We want to be in heaven with Christ, and we shall be there through His love and the favour of our God. But Israel is to possess the gate of his enemies, and to be exalted above all people of the earth. In the Psalms we have a sort of commentary upon these expectations of the godly in Israel. Thus in Psalm 67 we have the prayer, “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us (Selah); that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.” The preliminary of the blessing to other nations is the answer to Israel’s cry, “God be merciful unto us and bless us.” All hope for the world as such depends upon the blessing of the Jews.

It is not so as to the Church, which God is now calling out. Its blessing does not hinge on the promises or the blessing of any people. Hence these Psalms do not apply; yet persons persist in diverting them to present circumstances. No wonder that they are bewildered. The fault is in their perversion of the word of God. “Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee.” Now it extends to others. “O let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth.” When that day dawns, instead of the groaning and travailing which as yet prevails, “Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.” Anything like this is very far from being the case now. It

is the millennial state that is expected here, when the power of God will be put forth triumphantly, and God will acknowledge His people Israel, and other nations will be blessed in them. Now the Gentiles are "fellow-heirs and of the same body." Fellow-heirs with whom? With Christ, and with all who are in Christ. Whether Jews or Gentiles, they are fellow-heirs. Grace has put them on common ground. It is not now the Jews set on the pinnacle of the earth's blessing. On the contrary, as a nation they are dispersed, and God is judging them, not showing mercy: there is a complete obliterating of the old landmarks. And for this reason: the Jewish people were the real leaders in the world's enmity against Christ, and in the crucifying of their own Messiah. The cross of Christ terminated the distinctions between Jew and Gentile; and, founded upon that cross, God is building the Church. The vilest sinners upon the face of the earth, whether Jew or Gentile, God takes up; and, out of their condition of sin and distance from God, He puts them all upon one common heavenly level as members of the body of Christ. This is what God is doing now, and it is of immense importance to understand it, in order to enjoy fellowship with His ways. Besides, the whole Bible becomes practically a new and yet more precious book when this is understood. Truth cannot admit of compromise, however rightly we may seek to be patient; the revealed mind of God necessarily excludes the notion of people having their own private judgment. Neither you nor I have a right to an opinion on matters of faith. God is the only one entitled to speak on these things; and He has spoken so plainly that it is our sin if we do not hear Him. But you cannot sever truth from the spiritual affections. Hence, if people do not carry out the truth of the Church practically, they

lose it, and become bitter against it. God's mind about the Church always brings him who knows it into the world's enmity, and the special enmity of Christians who do not understand it. It was so with St. Paul pre-eminently, and it has been the same tale ever since, as souls have laid hold of his testimony; and so it must be. The doctrine that Paul held, if taught by the Spirit of God, never can admit of a party, because the very centre of it is Christ in heaven.

The apostle goes on with his statement; and this is the particular phase of the mystery that he brings out here — "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel; whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power." What is the effect of this truth? The most humbling possible. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." It brings out the value of Christ as nothing else does. He adds further, "And to make all men see what is the administration [not, fellowship] of the mystery." He shows thus, that besides the aspect of the mystery towards the saints, it has also its application to all men, without distinction — to those outside the Church. Persons who preach the gospel necessarily preach Christ; but there are few who understand the character of the grace which unites the soul with Christ in the relationship of members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. This was a main part of Paul's work. Therefore he adds, administration of the mystery, "which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." Mark, it is not

hid in the Scriptures, but “hid in God.” “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

Let us consider what a wonderful place this is — that God is now making known a new kind of wisdom to the angels above by His dealings with us; and, by us, I mean all the saints of God now on earth. For let them be called by whatsoever name, every saint of God is a member of the body of Christ. All belong truly and equally to the Church of God. One cannot but sorrow that so few understand or care what the Church of God is, and to act upon it. We ought to know what God intends, and how He intends His Church to walk. Christ is equally possessed by all; but all do not equally understand what the will of God about His Church is; how He would have us to worship Him, and to act upon His word together; how to help one another to carry out this glorious truth — God is manifesting by the Church His varied wisdom. Are we walking so according to the will of God for His Church, that He can point to us as a lesson to the angels of God? Such, and no less than this, is God’s intention. You cannot, surely, get rid of the responsibility connected with it, by refusing to act according to it! It is not by and by, when we reach heaven, that God will manifest by the Church His manifold wisdom to the heavenly hosts; but now on earth while the members of the Church are being called. “That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.” Does not this bring in serious considerations? It is not a question of what men think about us, and whether we are loved or disliked here below. Very sure I am, that if

we are walking according to Christ, we never can be anything but hated by the world; and it shows that we value the world if we wish otherwise. It is a most painful thing to feel that so it must be; but if I believe Christ, I must believe this, and I ought to rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer in the least degree. But besides this, the Church is called to be the lesson-book for the angels of God. When we think that God is overlooking with the angels that surround Him; that He is occupied with such objects as we are; that He sees in them the dearest objects of His affections; that He has given them Christ to be their life; and sent down the Holy Ghost, that blessed person of the Trinity, to take up His dwelling-place in them, and make them to be His temple, while they are in this world, what a calling it is! If an angel wants to know where His great love is, he must look down into this world and see it thus. You cannot sever Christ from the Church. But the wonderful thing is, that, before the angels of God, the astonishing conflict is going on — Satan and all his hosts endeavouring to mislead them by putting them on a false ground, preaching righteousness in a thousand forms, in order to lead them away from grace and from the cross of Christ. On the other hand, there you have God working by His word and Spirit to bring His people to a consciousness of their privileges. But whether the children of God are faithful or not, perfect love dwells upon them and acts toward them (it may be in discipline); God is occupied with them, caring for them, always keeping this before His mind, that He will have them perfectly like Christ. Nothing can cloud this. Weakness may for a time dishonour the Lord, and destroy our own comfort, and help on the delusion of the world. All that may be; but the purpose of God, it shall stand; what God has spoken

must be accomplished. Our weakness may be manifested, but God in His mighty love will complete His purpose. And this is the way in which He is teaching the principalities and powers in heavenly places a new kind of wisdom, that never was seen before in this world. They had seen God's ways in creation and at the deluge, and in Israel. But here was something that not even the Scriptures of God hinted, that was not promised to man — a thing entirely kept secret between the Father and the Son.

Now it is come out. The Holy Ghost is the One who develops and makes good this glorious truth of the Church of God. How far have our souls entered into it? How far do we content ourselves with vague guesses at it, thinking that it is of no great importance? Willing ignorance of this truth arises from a secret love of the world. There is the feeling in him who declines it, that you cannot take it up in heart and walk with the world. You must thoroughly break with everything that the flesh values under the sun. You have a place above the sun with Christ, and the consequence is that you are called on to submit to the sentence of death on everything here, to glorify the name of Christ and rejoice in Him, whatever may be the will of God about us. For no circumstances shut us out from the responsibility of being the witnesses of a glory that is above this world. The world ought to see in the Church the reflection of Christ. You may find a monk or a nun sweet morally, but all this may be mere nature and not Christ. I do not say that Christ may not be there too, in isolated cases, spite of an outrageously wicked system. To faith, however, it is a question of doing the will of God and of glorifying Christ in the place of earthly reproach.

God looks for the confession of the name of His Son at cost of all dear to us. If the world heed it not, is it in vain for the principalities and powers in heavenly places?

On the closing verse or two of the portion just before us, I did not comment. A few words now, therefore, on verses 12, 13. The apostle having alluded to Christ as the One in whom, exalted on high, the eternal purpose of God has now been revealed by the Spirit, adds, that in that same person "we have boldness and access, with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." Now it is very sweet to find how, even in so vast a subject as that which was occupying his heart and which he was desiring to press upon the saints, he can link on with the highest and deepest counsels of God the very simplest of the fundamental truths on which the believer rests. This is most instructive: because while, on the one hand, we saw before now that it is quite in vain to enter into the nature of the Church without having a simple, clear, and full understanding of the peace which Christ has made and which He is for us in the presence of God; on the other hand, when we do seize in any measure the character of the Church, when we see the astonishing privileges which are ours as being made one with Christ, we regard with a more intense enjoyment the first elements, and we realize the amazing stability of the foundations on which our souls are privileged to stand. Thus one sees God would take care that peace of conscience, and of the heart too, should be kept up practically. There is nothing that is merely given for the wonder of our minds. I do not say that there is not endless matter for admiration or that there is not an infinity to learn; but every step, and indeed the highest

attainment of the knowledge of God's purposes in Christ, is intimately linked with the confidence of our souls in His love. So that while we cannot apprehend aright the nature of the Church until we have known simple peace with God, when we do enter into it, that peace is brightened in the heavenly light of the privileges into which the Holy Ghost has been leading our souls. We come back with renewed understanding and deeper enjoyment of the boundless grace which is ours in Christ. Hence it is that having ushered us into this wonderful expanse of God's love and purposes, he for a moment glances at certain practical consequences in us. "In whom," says he, "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." It is not only peace, but "we have boldness," which refers more particularly to our speech in addressing God; being able, as it were, to say anything to Him, because of our confidence in His love. And "access with confidence," which is not merely what we utter, but the drawing near to Him, even where there may be no positive going forth of heart in the way of formal prayer; but there is the enjoyment of nearness, "access with confidence by the faith of him." "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." Here is another practical fruit of this blessed truth. We saw before how he introduces the unfolding of the Church along with the fact that he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. At the very moment when he was under the hand of the power of this world, and with the possibility of death before him, the Lord is pleased to bring out through the apostle the glorious calling of the Church. And he reminds them of this again. They might have been cast down at his sufferings. He says, on the contrary, you should not faint; tribulation ought to be rather that which would exercise and strengthen your

faith. In 2 Corinthians 1 the apostle speaks of being pressed out of measure, above strength, so that he despaired even of life. But when the Corinthians needed comfort, he had it from God and was able to give it out to them. Now he was under the world's power and in prison, and there God unfolds the glory of the Church. They would, no doubt, be called to suffer too, and would have to know what tribulation was. So that the apostle, in the fulness of his own enjoyment of the truth which enabled him to rejoice even in his sufferings, calls upon them not to faint. So entirely has the Spirit of God united together the saints, not only with Christ, but also with one another, that what Paul was suffering was their glory, not his only. They had a common interest in it as being members of the same body.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." (Ver. 14-16.) Here we are on perceptibly different ground, and I may say, higher than that of Ephesians 1. It is one of the two great relationships in which God stands to Christ, and, consequently, to us. For God now acts toward Christ, in view not merely of His person, but of His work. The consequence is that the work efficaciously puts us in the same place before God which belongs to Christ as man, yea, to Christ as man risen from the dead and in heaven. I carefully guard against saying all that Christ is, for this would not be true. We never can share what pertains to Him as the Son of the Father, from all eternity. It were impossible: the very conception of it would be irreverent. No creature can overpass the bounds which

separate him from God, neither would a renewed creature desire it. For in truth it is the joy of the most exalted creature to pay the lowliest homage to Him who is above him. Therefore I have little doubt that, in heaven among the angels of God, the highest is he who shows the deepest reverence. So, in earthly things, it is plainly the duty of every one to mark respect to the sovereign; but the one who has the place next to the sovereign has the largest opportunities and the strongest obligation to prove what the sovereign is in his eyes. So with us now in things spiritual.

In this portion, then, we have the second of the two great titles of God in relation to Christ and to us. It is not here, as in Ephesians 1, the God, but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God of Christ brings out Christ more as the glorious man, which He is — the glorified man in God's presence, the centre of all the counsels of God's power, who is even now exalted in the highest seat in heaven, and all things put under His feet. But it is plain that Christ has that which He values more than all that is set under His dominion — the love and delight of His Father in Him. Even our hearts are capable of understanding and enjoying this in the Holy Spirit. Indeed the time comes in most men's history, even where the world has counted them greatest and happiest, when they find a void that nothing can satisfy. But in Christ's case glory will not be the withering plant that human handling makes it. We know that in His hands it will be equally bright and holy, because God will be the object of it all; and everything, consequently, will be turned to His praise; as it is said, "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." But then no possession

of the universe, no expulsion of evil, no righteous judgment, no blessed control of every creature to the glory of God, could possibly satisfy the heart. There will be the salt of the everlasting covenant of God in it: the constant maintenance of God's will and glory will be felt. But there is something sweeter than any power, let it be ever so glorious or howsoever administered; and this we have here. It is the Father's love which is above all. The effect of the first prayer is, that you look down upon the immense scene that is put under Christ; and it is intended of God that you should. But the effect of the second is rather, you look up in the enjoyment of the love that is the secret of the glory, the glory being the effect and fruit of the love, and that which evidences what the love must have been, that has given such glory. But blessed as glory is, the love that gives the glory is still deeper and better. And hence when our Lord in John 17 prays for the saints — when He says, "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them," what is it for? "That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." This is the object of it. All are made perfect in one in that glory; but the end of this manifestation of glory is that the world may know how much the Father loved them. Thus, the glory that is seen, blessed as it must be, is not the end of everything. There was love before there was glory. And while I would not assert that there will be love after there is glory, still I do say that what produces, gives, and maintains the glory, is better than the glory itself. Ay, and there is nothing in all the thoughts of God more wondrous than that God can love such as we are with the same love wherewith He loves His Son. And He does so love us; I know it for myself, and dishonour His word if I do not know it. If He says it, is it not that I may

believe it and take it home to my heart, and enjoy it now in this world? — that I may use it as my constant buckler against everything that flesh, or world, or Satan can insinuate against me? He loves us as He loved Him. Do not say it is too high a thought. I know nothing so humiliating — that so convicts us of being nothing — as this that, so loved, we should so little feel it; that, so loved, we should so feebly return it; that, so loved, we should yield to the cares, the vanities, the thoughts, the pursuits, anything, in short, that is not according to such love. It is the delight and, if we may so say, the desire of God that those who are His should enter into the greatness of His love. For no glory, nor sense of it, nor confidence in it, nor waiting for it, ought to be enough even for such hearts as ours. It is a wonderful thing to think that we are to share the glory of Christ: but more so that we have the same love. The same God who gives us the glory of Christ, will have our souls enter even now by the Holy Ghost into the community of the same love; and such is the grand central thought of this prayer: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Father of Christ is that relationship which brings out the love, just as the kingdom of Christ is connected with His conferred or human glory. In the one case it is what He is going to do for us. If we think what He did for Adam, what His purpose was about man, what will He not do for the last Adam, even Christ? And all that He does for Him as this blessed, glorious man, He will share with us. But more than this. The love that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ bears to Him, He bears also to us. We know how He expressed it when His Son was here — at what striking moments He brought out

His love — how jealous He was lest man should suppose that He was indifferent to His beloved Son. Suffering allowed is no proof that He does not love; yea, rather, the contrary — it proves how much, not only He trusts our love, but how much also He would have us to trust His — confiding in Him, that, spite of all appearances, He loves us as He loves His Son. We may be exposed to all that Satan can array against us; but we are only in the same scene which the Son of His own love has trodden before us. But when men might have thought from this or that, that Jesus was no more than any other man, see how God vindicates Him. Thus, it was not only that John the Baptist tried to hinder the Lord Jesus from being baptized, as if He needed to confess anything — for that baptism was a confession of sins; and therefore did John show his astonishment that there should be even the appearance of confession on the part of such an one as Jesus. But God had deeper thoughts, and allows that there should be that which unbelief might torture into the insinuation of evil, but which faith lays hold of, and for which we only adore Him and the Lamb yet more. So it was that the Father, when His beloved Son rose out of the Jordan, where all others were confessing unrighteousness — where He was fulfilling all righteousness — where He who had no unrighteousness to confess, still would not be severed from those who were doing that which became their unrighteousness, who were owning the God whose rights had been forgotten — when, in sympathy with the holy feeling that led them there, He would be with them there: then it was that the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It was just at the right moment, and with the fullest wisdom; but with what love the Father uttered these words! He that

served Him as He never was served before — He that glorified Him as God never had been glorified on this earth — He that finished the work which God had given Him to do — was God likely to betray the smallest turning aside of His heart from Him? But yet we know that at the moment when He most of all needed it, when all else was against Him, then, crowning all, God forsook Him. If sin was to be judged and put away for ever, it must be judged in all its reality. There must be no sparing, nor mitigating the wrath of God about sin. The whole judgment of God fell upon Him. The work was done: sin was put away by the sacrifice of Himself.

And now all the love which the Father had towards this Blessed One can flow out to us on the ground of that work. It is there that the apostle puts us, brought into the place of sons with the Father; and he bows his knee to the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family in heaven and earth is named." The expression "the whole family" is jumbled up with people's notions about the Church, as if part were supposed to be in heaven and part on earth. But the real force is "every family." There is no reference to the unity of the Church here. On the contrary, he means that when we look at the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, we rise sufficiently high to take in every class of creatures that God has made. Supposing you look at God as He made Himself known of old, it was as Jehovah to Israel. Does every family in heaven and earth come under this title? Not a single family in heaven, and only one family on earth. Under the title of Jehovah there is a separate relationship in which God reveals Himself to the Jews. He was their God in a sense in which He was not the God of any other people. As Creator, He is the God of all;

and thus in some scriptures the term “God” is used, not Jehovah, because of a certain dealing with Gentiles. But where it concerns the ancient people of God, he uses the term Jehovah. Nay, in the second book of Psalms, when the Holy Ghost is contemplating the godly Jew cleaving to God far from His temple, we have not Jehovah prominent, but “God;” for they are not able to enjoy what is specially given to Israel. He never will cease to be God; and they find their blessing in this — come what may — God cannot deny Himself. They are outside the special place in which He had promised to bless them; but God was God everywhere. So that, if they were cast out of the Holy Land, and could not go up to the temple to worship according to the law, God could never cease to be God. It is the very same principle of grace that Christ was bringing down the poor Syrophenician woman to; for we must always come to our true position; and the same thing in substance is verified in every real conversion. I must always be brought down to the truth of what I am, as well as receive the truth of what God is; and then there is no limit to the blessing.

I have just referred to this, by the way, for the purpose of illustrating by contrast the phrase “every family in heaven and in earth.” When God was revealing Himself in special relationship with Israel, it was as Jehovah. In Daniel we hear not of Jehovah, but the God of heaven, clearly in contradistinction to God revealing Himself on the earth to a certain people to which He gave a peculiar land and privileges that no other nation shared along with them. They go after false gods: He takes His place in heaven, and falls back upon what never could be denied, and as “the God of heaven” He says, I will choose now whom I will; I will take the very worst

people in the whole world, and will give them the empire of the earth. So He chose the enemy of the Jew — the Babylonians. If God is acting thus sovereignly, as the God of heaven, the vilest may have the power here below. But “there is a God that judgeth the earth;” and when the day comes to verify this, it will be in the midst of His people as Jehovah. Looked at in this way, He has only one family that stands in covenant relationship to Himself: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” But here we have the contrast. He is revealed not merely as Jehovah, having Israel, His people, upon earth, but as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The moment He speaks in such a relationship as this, it is expressly in association with One who made everything, as was said before, “who created all things by Jesus Christ.” All creatures therefore come into view, and find their due place with Him as the Father, because the Lord Jesus is He who formed all, and for whose glory all was made. Hence all families in heaven and in earth, let them be principalities and powers, angels, Jews or Gentiles, as well as the Church of God — all come under “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The title of Jehovah is restricted to a particular race: the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is unlimited in its range and brings in every class of beings that God has made.

This puts the Church in a most remarkable position, taking us away from all that is local or temporary. We ourselves may have the most special place within this display of divine glory, but still we have to do with a God and Father who is the proclaimed and supreme source of everything else. We may be, we are, if we understand the calling of the Church, near to Him, in a place that none can share, a nearness that no angel enjoys. I mean

by “we,” all the members of the Church of God. We have by grace a place of association with Christ before God, which none others enter. But as He is revealing Himself in connection with Christ as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, so He brings in other classes of beings that He has made for the purpose of His giving blessing in their suited measure. He has brought out the heir and centre of all His purposes, and there is not a single class of beings that He has made for His praise, but what are put in their proper place before the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in contrast with the peculiarity of the Jew as being the sole possessor of the privileges God gave to them as Jehovah. The Father is Jehovah, and so is Jesus; but it is not thus that we have to do with Him; nor is this our intelligent character of address to Him. It is to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ that the apostle is here bending his knees. And we ought to be conscious that we are drawing near to Him in the full nearness that such a title implies. He takes within His eye and heart all the creation as that which He means to bless with Christ. But there are those that have rejected Christ; and, remember, God’s very same love of Christ which means to bless the creation through Christ, will maintain His glory against those who despise Him. This is a solemn truth. There is nothing more intolerant of evil than love, and the gospel of God has, as its background, the eternal condemnation of every soul that despises Jesus, the Son of God. It must be so. The same disciple that was the favoured one of God to bring out love as none other had done, is the one who brings out the eternal death of those who refuse His love. The revelation, therefore, of the endless ruin of those that despise Christ, is in the closest possible connection with the love that brings out the everlasting blessedness of

those that cleave to Him. Thus we have this universality brought in, “Of whom the every family in heaven and earth is named.”

But there are, by grace, those who will have that which is most peculiar, which in nearest to His heart in the midst of this scene of love and glory. For these the prayer is, “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; being rooted and grounded in love, that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” The prayer in chapter 1 was for a deep and real apprehension of their standing before God; here it is rather for practical, inward power by the Holy Ghost. That was that they might know better their place in Christ, as to the call of grace and the inheritance of glory; this is that Christ might have His place in their hearts by faith. In a word, it is here a question of actual state, of the affections having Christ within, of being rooted and grounded in love, that they might be thoroughly able (for so it means) to apprehend that which is indeed measureless. The apostle does not say of what — he leaves you there without any ending to the sentence. He brings you into infinity. I do not believe that it means the breadth, length, depth, and height of the love of Christ. The passage is often quoted so, and oftener so understood; but the “and” of the next verse indicates another sense distinctly: — “And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” The love of Christ is evidently an additional thought. What then is the meaning? If it were not too bold to fill up an outline which the apostle has left thus vaguely, I might venture

to think that what he puts before us here, with such singular marks of undefined grandeur, is the mystery of which he had been speaking, and assuredly not Christ's love, which he immediately adjoins. He had shown how every family in heaven and earth is ranged under Him who is the Father of the Lord Jesus. In connection with this he prays, that they might be able to apprehend with all saints "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height." It is in relation to the heavenly counsel of God the Father, once a secret, but now disclosed. All things were for the glory of His Son — the whole creation, heavenly and earthly; and the saints are to have the very highest place with Him over it all.

But there was something still deeper than this, and which needed to be known along with it. Therefore he adds, "And to know the love of Christ which surpasseth knowledge, that ye might be filled to all the fulness of God." Glorious as all these prospects are, what can compare with His love? The best wine is kept to the last. "To know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." It may seem to be a paradox to say so, but a blessed one. He does not mean that we shall ever know it perfectly. But there may be the knowing more and more of that which surpasses knowledge. He supposes us launched upon that sea where there is no shore: we can never reach the end of His love. Yet he speaks of knowing the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ; "that ye might be filled to all the fulness of God." You could no more get to the end of the love, than you could get to the end of God Himself. Nothing can be more wonderful than such a desire for us, feeble creatures as we are, "that ye might be filled to all the fulness of God." And yet it is for the saints now that the apostle thus prayed; not that we

might know ourselves to be Christ's body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all, but practically enlarged entrance by the power of the Spirit into God's fulness. It is the heart's condition, and real growth in communion with God that is before us here; and this most appropriately after the standing has been treated, and before the exhortations as to walk and conduct.

Hence further, "Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." He does not say, above all that we can ask or think. The Holy Ghost takes particular care not to say so. There is some difference to be remarked between what we do and what we can ask and think. There is no limit to what we may ask, save that God is above anything that can be asked of Him; yet He loves to hear us asking more and more. He would exercise us in asking more abundantly.

Thus there is dependence on God, "according to the power that worketh in us." Whose power is this? It is God's, who Himself dwells in every Christian. It is God Himself who makes every saint now, every Christian, to be His temple. Therefore, however poor and weak the believer may be, looked as he is, yet what cannot God make such an one to be? He is the temple of God. God will always be above him, higher than any man's expectations of His love; but it is taken into account that there is a power which now works in us, as well as a power which has wrought for us, to which we can set no limits. As to the power that wrought for us, we see it in Ephesians 1. This was the power which raised up Christ from the dead. Yes, it is the same power that wrought to usward, that has raised us up from our death, and that raised up Christ from the dead. But now He goes farther, and points to the power that works in us to give us

entrance into His love and God's fulness. Do we remember that this is precisely the thing in which we most fail? For there is many a soul constantly proving how little it thinks of this power; how apt it is to be murmuring, and tried by the very things which, if it only had the sense of His love, it would bless Him for. "To him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." In what a special point of view the Church appears! He intimates that there will never be a time when the Church will not have its own peculiar place. But it is not only true that the saints ought to have a wonderful introduction into the love of Christ and the fulness of God, by His power that works in us now; but it would appear also that there never will be a time, in all the ages to come, when there will not be an unique and blessed character of relationship between the Church as such and God Himself — the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is confirmed by the beautiful scene in Revelation 21, where we have no longer nations and kings, but God with men. There it is not said simply, "Behold, God is come to dwell with men," but His tabernacle. It is not only that God then deigns to dwell with men, but "the tabernacle of God is with men." It seems exactly the same thing that is here called the Church. God, dwelling in the Church, will take up His place with men; so that the peculiar dwelling-place of God in the Church will continue, even when the scene is an eternal one. Thus, when the heavens and earth have passed away, after the great white throne, and when all the saints will be in their resurrection bodies, then not only will God be in face of men, but "the tabernacle of

God" will come down to be with men — God dwelling with them in His own tabernacle, which tabernacle can hardly but be that which is here called the Church. So that the Church, even in eternity, when all enemies and things shall be subdued, will enjoy the sweet and amazing privilege of being the home or dwelling-place of God. What manner of persons, then, ought we to be in holy conversation and godliness!

Thus there is dependence on God, but it is One who is able to bless us unlimitedly, "according to the power that worketh in us."

Ephesians 4

Before entering upon the subject of ministerial gifts, which is brought before us later on in the chapter, the Holy Ghost dwells upon the unity that belongs to the saints of God in Christ now. It was necessary that this should be laid down as a grand platform upon and in connection with which ministry takes its course. For ministry rather brings into prominence individual members of Christ and not so much the entire body. For although it is a common statement that the Church teaches, it is really and entirely unfounded. Indeed the notion leads to the pretence of infallibility; and this finds its most open expression in Romanism. The truth is, the Church never teaches, but, on the contrary, is the body that is taught. There is no such thing as a body that teaches. The Church, no doubt, contains within itself the husbandmen that are employed of the Lord; but itself is God's husbandry, or the scene on which God labours to produce fruit unto Himself. This is an important truth practically; because it destroys all pretension on the Church's part to create or even define doctrines. The Church is called to be the pillar and ground of the truth; it is bound to take care by holy discipline that nothing contrary to the truth should be tolerated within it: God's assembly cannot relieve itself from this responsibility. But while this attaches to the entire christian community, that it should be that body which on earth holds out the truth before men and within which we must come if the truth, having been believed, is to be acted on at all; yet the way in which God has been pleased to work for the spread of His truth upon consciences is by individual members of His Church who

are qualified for this particular purpose. Power to teach depends upon the gift conferred by sovereign grace. It is no question of an abstract right that any man can teach or preach if he likes. There is no such license in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus has a right to call and to communicate power in the Holy Ghost as He pleases. The Church is not a society of men who hold particular views on this or that: still less is it the gathering into one of the world. It is the assembly of God, of those He calls and wherein He dwells. And as this is true with regard to the whole — that it all belongs to God — that it is God who forms, and guards it, and maintains His own holiness and glory in it, so is it in respect of ministry, which is one very important function that is maintained in particular members of the Church. That is, there is the unity which the believers now have in Christ Jesus by virtue of which there is the assembly of God — the common unity of blessing in which all believers now stand and which is the groundwork, if I may so say, of everything. But in connection with it you have ministry at work, which pertains to particular members rather than to the whole Church. The gifts are in and of some for the good of all.

This divides the earlier portion into two parts. In the opening verses, to the end of verse 6, we find rather the unity of the Spirit; from verse 7 the diversity of the members of Christ. First of all, observe that the Holy Ghost has brought us now to the ground of exhortation. We have doctrine in the first three chapters; now we come to practice. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” This vocation consists of two parts more particularly. First, the saints, all who know

the Lord Jesus now, compose one body in Him; secondly, they are the habitation of God through the Spirit. Thus, although the assembly of God is a body existing upon earth, yet it is founded upon heavenly privileges, the body of Christ showing us our corporate blessedness, the habitation of God through the Spirit rather bringing before us our responsibility as having God dwelling in the midst of us. It is too clear that these two things are very feebly entered into even by true children of God. When they hear of the body of Christ, the idea is scarcely more than that they are forgiven, are children of God, and are going to heaven. How very little all this is a measure of what is implied in the body of Christ! Many true believers suppose it to mean the aggregate of those who are reconciled to God — the objects of His favour who are not left to die in their sins. But one might have all these privileges without any of the characteristic features of Christ's body, or God's habitation through the Spirit. It would have been quite possible, if God had been so pleased to order it, that Christians should have been children of God, conscious of their redemption, knowing their sonship, fully expecting to be glorified with Christ in heaven, and yet never have been joined together as one body in Christ, with God dwelling among them by a special presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. This was a superadded privilege over and above redemption through the blood of Christ. And this is so true, that if you search all the Old Testament through, you will find that never are the saints of God spoken of there as members of Christ's body, the habitation of God through the Spirit.

But more than that. The prophets are full of a glorious scene yet to be enacted on this earth, when the Lord will put down Satan's power. There is a time coming when evil will no longer be permitted to go unpunished, nor good to suffer here below; and when that day comes, Scripture is plain that although God will have a people for Himself upon earth, they will not be joined together as one body, nor will they form His habitation through the Spirit. It is between the two advents of Christ, between the grace which has appeared, and the glory which is going to appear (Titus 2:11-13,) that we hear of the special vocation wherewith we are called. For let us consider what the body of Christ is — His body, of course, I mean, not as predicated of Himself personally, but as composed of and applied to those who believe in Christ now, that spiritual corporation to which belong all true saints of God now found upon the earth and ever since Pentecost. What are the blessings which constitute it? What does the Holy Ghost mean by membership of this body? I answer, the cross, being the witness and expression of the guilt of the Jews more especially (the guilt, doubtless, of all men in general, but pre-eminently of the Jews), gave occasion for God to dissolve completely, for the time being, the peculiar place of favour which the Jewish people had previously possessed. God Himself blotted out the landmark which separated Israel from the Gentiles; and instead of making Israel to be the one channel of His promise, on the contrary, the tide of blessing turns decidedly and conspicuously towards the Gentiles. He gathers out of Jews and Gentiles a people for His name, and joins together this election out of them both, who believe in Christ, in order to the possession of new privileges that never had been tasted in like mode or measure before.

One most remarkable feature of the blessing is, that the distinction between Jew and Gentile is gone. In the cross they united in wickedness before God. But what does God use it for? He says, as it were, I will take that very cross which man has made the scene of his outrageous rebellion against Me — which proved that My ancient people were grown violent in hostility against Me in the person of My Son; and I will make the cross to be the pivot on which will turn fuller, richer blessing than had even been hoped for by believing men in this world before. Thus, as the cross was the rallying point of Satan to gather men in an unholy union against God and His Son, so God makes it to be the precious centre where He forms the Jews and Gentiles that believe in His Son into a new body, where all such distinctions are blotted out for ever. And if God is pleased to call out a people for the purpose of giving a practical testimony to this new display of His love, who is to gainsay it? The law is righteous; and it would be an outrage upon God to put the smallest stigma upon the ten words. But while the commandment is holy, just, and good, grace brings in what is higher and better still. It is right, of course, if I do well, that I should be rewarded for it; but is it not more blessed, if I do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently? This is grace, acceptable with God, and the practical principle on which He is calling His children now to act. It was not the public rule of government in Old Testament times, but the contrast of it. Does God, then, contradict Himself? Far from it. God may have one way of dealing with the Jewish people; and then He may lay down another mode of action with Christians. Indeed, who can deny that He has? The Jew would have been guilty of a grievous sin if he had not been circumcised; and I believe that, as far as the earth is

concerned, even in the bright day that is coming, the Jew will have his land, city, priest, and temple, etc. The will of God for the Jews will remain substantially unchanged. I find in the prophecies a state of things not yet accomplished, when all these outward ordinances of God will be fulfilled. Am I not to believe God till I see the prophecies thus realized? It is not thus we treat the word of a good man. But if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. And for a man to receive Samuel and Kings, and not to believe Ezekiel or Hosea, is to treat God as you would not treat an ordinary man. But if I believe all that He has said, there are peculiar principles of God for the Jews which are still to be carried out by the Messiah reigning in power when the devil is bound. God will accomplish all that He has spoken of in the prophets in the days of heaven upon the earth. But meanwhile the Messiah that was promised to bring in the glory came, and has been rejected. Instead of having a throne, He had the cross; and far from taking the earth for His inheritance, He was cast out of it and went up to heaven. A new state of things consequently was opened; and for this order, altogether different from that contemplated generally in the prophecies, we have the New Testament revelation. Therein we find what meets little intimations here and there in the Old Testament, but at the same time introduces, as a whole, a scene without precedent or successor, where God unfolds privileges that were never tasted before, and looks for a walk that He did in no way demand even from saints of old.

There are, of course, certain plain, fixed principles always obligatory. God never sanctioned a lie, or covetousness, or malice: no dispensation can neutralize

or weaken the grand moral distinctions between right and wrong. But the God who wrought in earthly power to protect His people, and would have protected them had they been faithful under the law, now, on the contrary, calls His people to suffer in grace. The same God who shielded them and brought them through the Red Sea, and who would not allow any power to gain universal supremacy in the earth till Israel had proved themselves unfaithful, then, when they did manifest themselves altogether unworthy, permitted Babylon, the very worst of the Gentile powers, to overthrow them; and then one empire succeeded another, till finally, under the Romans, both Jews and Gentiles united in crucifying the Lord of glory. Then the world's doom was sealed; the knell of its judgment sounded from the cross of Jesus. You might have expected, had God been then acting upon principles of righteousness, that at once the universe of God would have been convulsed, at least Jerusalem and Rome destroyed in His fiery indignation. Far otherwise. Heaven opens, but it is to receive the crucified Jesus, not to judge His murderers: it is furthermore to send down the Holy Ghost on earth, to form by grace this new body the Church of God; it is to bring those vile murderers of Jesus, if they only received Him, into a place of blessing, whose breadth, and length, and depth, and height never had been enjoyed or known before. And this is grace. "The law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The gospel of God's grace goes out; but it does not merely save souls — it gathers them, unites them to Christ, makes them members of Him and one of another. The Old Jewish vantage-ground has disappeared; the Levitical privileges are completely eclipsed as far as the Church is concerned. The Gentiles were sunk in idolatry, and the

Jews self-complacent under God's law which they kept not; but both are brought through the Spirit, by faith in Christ, into this one body, and worship God on the same common ground of grace. They are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This is "the vocation wherewith we are called."

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord," etc. He again points to that honourable scar from the world's enmity, because he is bringing out in a practical way what the consequence was in this world even to the greatest servant of God that ever lived (next to Christ). After all, he was the Lord's prisoner. What a wonderful honour? There were no fiery chariots to surround him, as with Elijah; no power put forth to preserve him. He is suffering from the same empire that crucified the Lord of glory; and out of his prison he is cheering the saints to walk worthy of that same calling! Even now the world is overmatched: what will it be when Christ comes?

Nevertheless, the word is, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." There was a danger of the contrary: spiritual privilege might be misused to puff up the saints. He therefore meets this, and shows them the only proper tone that becomes the Christian. "With all lowliness and meekness." It is a blessed thing to find zeal; but what can redeem the walk of a Christian which fails in lowliness and meekness? There is a time to be firm and a time to be yielding, but neither gift nor position can justify those who seem to think that in their case the exhortation to meekness and lowliness has no place. We must take care, on the other hand, that it is not meekness in manner or lowliness in word only, for God looks in us for what is real. Too often, such humility but

covers the deepest pride, as love and the spirit of Christ are most talked of where they least exist. Let us beware of this vain show.

But supposing there is that in others which you cannot overlook, as being contrary to the mind of God, how are we to act? No doubt there should be the fitly spoken word of reproof, if needful; but there is to be “long-suffering” also; and if in any place long-suffering be specially called for, it is where evil touches ourselves. We are not to tolerate evil against the Lord; but wherever it is that which injures us, long-suffering is the word, “forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Here it is not only the lowly grace and patience which the Christian has to cherish, but the spiritual diligence with which he is called to hold fast what is most precious and divine here below.

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” How perfect is Scripture! It does not say, “the unity of the body,” although including it. But had it been said, “the unity of the body,” people might have built up (as indeed they have) an outward institution and made it a point of life and death not to separate from that. But what the Holy Ghost lays upon those belonging to Christ is, “endeavouring” — showing all needed earnestness — not to make, but “to keep the unity of the Spirit.” It is something already made by the Spirit which we have to maintain or observe. It is not merely that we are to have feelings of love towards our fellow-christians. This might be in a thousand different bodies; but if ever so well heeded, this would not be keeping “the unity of the Spirit.” What is meant then? The unity of the Holy Ghost, which is already formed, embraces all the

members of Christ. And where are the members of Christ to be found? In one sense, thank God, everywhere: in another, alas! anywhere. Wherever Christ is preached and souls have received Him, there are His members. And what have we to do? Diligently to maintain the unity that embraces everyone belonging to Christ — “in the bond of peace.” Here we find peace spoken of, not so much for our own souls with God, but rather for enjoying and furthering practically union among saints of God. The flesh is anxious and restless: a peaceful spirit is the fruit of the Holy Ghost, and mightily contributes to the binding together of hearts in practice. God’s Spirit is not occupied with merely giving right opinions about points: deeper purposes are His. He is bowing souls to Christ, and exalting Him in their eyes. But to bring one soul out of darkness into light, or out of a little into deeper light, is surely precious; and this is what God Himself is now engaged with. We do well, while holding fast our liberty for Christ, not to allow the barriers that men have brought in, but to treat them as null and void.

But, then, it will be, as is often, said that every man has a right of private judgment. I deny it totally. No man has a right to an opinion in divine things; God only and absolutely is entitled to communicate His mind. What one has to do is to get out of the way, that God’s light may shine into the hearts of His children. Men, in their self-importance, only cause their dark shadows to pass over themselves and each other: they thus hinder instead of helping the communication of divine truth. Whereas, when the desire of Christ’s servant is, that God may lead on and strengthen His children, is it in vain? Never. The moment you begin to gather people

round a particular person, view, or system, you are only forming a sect. For this is a party, though it may contain many members of Christ, which forms its basis of union, not on Christ, but on points of difference, which thus become a special badge and means of separating between the children of God. The apostolic Church never challenged a convert's faith as to an establishment or dissent — never asked, Do you believe in episcopacy, voluntaryism, or even the Church of God? The true and God-glorifying enquiry ever was and is, Do you believe in the Christ of God? It is true that in early days, if a man confessed Christ, he was cast off by Jews and Gentiles, and became an object of enmity to all the world; and this was no slight a guard then against people confessing Christ, unless they really believed in Him. But if a man had received the Holy Ghost, through the hearing of faith, he was at once a member of the one body, and acknowledged as such.

Why should this not rule now? Am I not content with the wisdom of God? Would I then supplement His word, or do without or against it? It is no sect if you act upon the mind of God; it is a sect if you depart from it. The question, therefore, is, what is God's intention about His Church? How would He have us to meet? Am I willing to receive all real Christians — persons whom all believe to be converted? Doubtless there is such a thing as putting them out if they prove not to be so; for there is no possible case of evil but what the word of God applies to, so that there is not the smallest need for any rules or regulations of men. Unless men are spiritual, they will not keep the unity of the Spirit long; they will soon find abundant ground for fault-finding. But those who hold fast and firm to Christ as the centre of the Spirit's unity,

as they are no sect, so they never can become one, whatever be the schisms, divisions, heresies, of their adversaries. It is very sorrowful that any souls should go away in self-condemnation, but it is the more blessed for those who, spite of all, have faith and patience and grace to stay. The apostle said, in writing to the Corinthians, “There must needs be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest.” These were the men who in that day clave to the Lord with full purpose of heart. May the same thing be true of us now! I deny that the word of God is made of none effect, or that I am in any way bound to sin now more than then. The unity of the Spirit which the Ephesians had to keep, is the unity which God lays upon all His children. If the word has regenerated my soul through the Holy Ghost; if through it I know my Saviour and my Father; if to it I am indebted as the means God uses for cleansing my soul from day to day, am I to say that I need not follow His word as a member of Christ’s body in the assembly of God, where He dwells in the Spirit? Surely, if my soul owns its divine authority, woe is me if I do not seek to follow it in all things. God calls on us to be diligent in maintaining “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” It is not the unity of our spirits, but the unity of the Spirit.

When we reflect that it is the Holy Ghost who forms this unity, is it not a solemn thought? Ought we not to guard against anything that would grieve Him? Our Lord attached special importance to what touched the Holy Ghost; and so should we, if wise. If the Holy Ghost is here for this purpose on earth, He becomes a divine test for souls, whether they are prepared to honour Him or not. But people might say, if you receive all Christians

without requiring them to give a pledge for the future, tacitly, if not expressly, you may accept a Socinian or an Arian. But I do not acknowledge such to be Christians at all: do you? What is the Church founded on? “Whom say ye that I am,” says our Lord in the very chapter in which He first notices that He was going to build the Church. “Thou art the Christ,” said a disciple, “the Son of the living God.” And what does our Lord reply? “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” Hence there ought to be the strongest, strictest dealing with souls, whether in deed and in truth they believe and confess the divine glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The smallest compromise as to this allowed would be a reason for standing in doubt of any soul. You have no ground to receive as a Christian him who tampers with the purity, glory, or integrity of the person of Christ. The Church is founded on Christ the Son of God: if this rock be shaken, all is gone. “If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” To touch Christ is to touch the very basis on which the Church of God rests.

But where a soul confesses Christ really and truly, confesses Him in such a way that it commends itself to your conscience as divine, receive him; for God has. He may be Baptist or Paedo-Baptist: never mind, receive him. If he is living in sin, need I say that Christ and drunkenness, etc., cannot go together? Faith in the Son of God is incompatible with walking in darkness. No matter how a man may talk about Christ, if he joins with that confession a disregard for the moral glory of God, he proves by this fact that he is not born of God. Simon Magus thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money. It was a mistake that he made, some will say. Yes, but that mistake was vital, and proved that he

could not have life from God; and therefore, though baptized, he was not received as a member of the body of Christ. We have no reason to think that he broke bread at all. Baptism would be no reason, in the face of such circumstances, why the assembly should receive him whom they do not believe to be a saint.

This will show in some degree the character or limits of the unity of the Spirit. For the Holy Spirit, while He calls souls and empowers them to confess Christ, never leaves them to walk in the mire of their own wickedness. If a believer falls into sin of a certain character, he ought to be put away. What is merely personal should be dealt with in a private way; it would be monstrous to put all failures on the same ground. The first and deep feeling of the soul ought to be, in vindicating God, to get the person right. The Church is a witness of divine grace, and has to seek the blessing of the unconverted and the restoration of Christians who have gone astray. Are we endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit? How is it that Christians are formed into different associations? If the word of God be that which they at all cost seek to carry out, why do they require human rules and modern inventions? If God gives a rule, I do not want another; I do want to have His in all its strength, so as to bring forth the truth to a man’s conscience, and say, That is God’s will. Is it well or wise to yield this up? God has written a word that bears upon everything moral, by which He intended His children to walk: are we doing so? Some may ask, Are you, then, perfect? I answer, We are endeavouring to hold fast and in peace the Spirit’s unity, we are honestly seeking subjection to the will of God: are you doing the same? This is the main question for every child of God — Am I endeavouring to keep the

unity of the Spirit? And am I doing it in God's way or out of my own head? Have I surrendered myself to do His will? Our business is to be dutiful to Him. We have our orders, and our responsibility is to carry them out, subject to Him whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve.

But further, this unity is to be kept in the bond of peace. God is forming His Church of all those who belong to Himself. It is not Christian persons holding particular views of this or that; but the Spirit holding to His own unity, or to what Christ is to them, not to the points in which they differ one from another. If I want to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, I must have my own soul settled upon this: the Holy Ghost is glorifying Christ alone. You cannot please the Father more than in exalting the Son; and you cannot touch Him more nearly than by slighting His Son. All is secured in maintaining Christ. This brings it to the simplest possible issue. What have we to do with forcing people to give up their views and adopt ours, let them be ever so correct? God's word furnishes a ground, in the name of Christ, on which you can embrace all saints, let them be ever so weak or prejudiced. Let us beware of being more careful of our own reputation or ease than of His will. Let us not be vain of our little knowledge, or of the point we have attained to in practice. Let us look up to the Lord for faith and patience to own every real member and servant of Christ, wherever found. Let us cleave to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and be diligent in maintaining it, whatever the difficulties may be, and surely they are great. Faith does not see many bodies and one Spirit — it knows but one body. Bearing with others who in this see dimly or double, let us be rigid in

holding fast the name of Christ, and for ourselves be careful to accredit nothing contrary to it. “There is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.” This is our most essential, vital blessing in Christ; “for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” “One Spirit” is added immediately, because it is the Holy Ghost who makes it good; and what we are now, by the power of the Holy Ghost, we hope to enjoy by-and-by with Christ. We shall have it fully and perfectly in the presence of God in heaven. This is the first unity.

There is a difference between this and the following verses. The fourth verse is one character of unity, the fifth another, and the sixth a third; and these concentric unities enlarge respectively. “There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” Nobody enters into this who is not born and baptized of the Holy Ghost. This one body is on earth, no doubt; but then it is a real thing and of God now, whatever may be the glory proper to it hereafter. But in verse 5 you have a more outside unity, an area of profession, larger than that of real spiritual power. Here “the Lord” is made prominent; and there are many who will say in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?”

Hence we hear next of “one faith,” by which is meant the christian faith. If I talk about faith in the sense of its being the medium by which we lay hold of Christ, and are saved in the grace of God, it is never called one faith. By the phrase is meant the common faith that all Christians profess, in contradistinction to the religion or law of Jews and the idolatry of Gentiles. Accordingly, “one Lord, one faith,” is followed by “one baptism;” because whoever professed to believe in Christ was

baptized with water. Simon Magus received Christ nominally, and was baptized, though he soon proved to be no Christian. Thus, verse 5 gives us, not the unity which is real, and holy, and enduring, but that of the christian profession.

Last of all, we have “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.” (Ver. 6.) Evidently in this we stand before a still vaster compass. There is an immense mass of mankind that does not profess Christ at all. The bulk of men have gone on with their idols, spite of law and gospel. Are there no claims there? We own “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.” That is, it is a personal God: not at all the idea that everything is God, which is infidelity in its worst shape, or Pantheism. We own “one God,” not a number of divinities, like the Gentiles, but “one God and Father of all.” The Jew did not believe that He was the Father of all, nor even properly Father for the chosen nation, but rather their Governor, even Jehovah. The Christian revelation brings out God in an infinitely larger, as well as for us more intimate, character; but larger, too, as embracing all creaturehood — “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all” (His supremacy and providence, but more than these), “and in you all.” There is His near connection with some, and not with all. For it is not said, “in all,” but “in you all.” The Holy Ghost is speaking of the Father’s peculiar relationship to the Christian. Thus nothing can be more full, and beautiful, and orderly than these unfoldings of unity in and around Christ our Lord.

We have now closed the statement which the apostle has given us of the unity of the Spirit, the common place

which pertains to all the children of God who are being called through His grace by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. We enter now the special ways in which the Lord calls upon the various members of His body to serve Him — not so much the common position which all must have who belong to Him, but the peculiar privileges and responsibilities of each individual member of Christ. And thus the seventh verse opens: “but unto every (or each) one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” This is the basis. Christ, according to His own good pleasure, as Head and Lord, is giving certain gifts. It is important to observe that this is the point of view in which the Holy Ghost presents ministry in Ephesians. There is no one brought, I need hardly say, into such unequivocal prominence as Christ. In Corinthians, on the contrary, the Holy Ghost is more prominent than Christ. Both aspects are necessary to God’s glory and equally perfect in their place; but they are not the same thing. There is the wisdom of God in each epistle suited to the special object that God Himself aims at.

It is impossible for any spiritual mind to look back upon the Epistle to the Ephesians without perceiving that the great truth of it is the fulness of blessing which belongs to the Church in virtue of its union with Christ. This, accordingly, brings Christ into relief. On the other hand, we cannot study the Epistle to the Corinthians, and particularly that part of it where the subject of spiritual manifestations is treated of, without seeing that it is not so much a question of Christ exalted at the right hand of God, as of the Holy Ghost sent down here below. The consequence is that in Corinthians we have rather the assembly upon earth and the divine person who is

pleased to dwell and work in it. Thus the Holy Ghost is brought there into view; whereas, in Ephesians, it is Christ as the Head of the Church, who is regarded still as the giver of these gifts. Indeed in no part of Scripture is the Holy Ghost represented as properly the giver; and I doubt much, with another, that the expression “gifts of the Spirit” is an accurate phrase. You may find, in Hebrews 2:4, a text which seems to imply as much; but it is the “distributions of the Spirit.” Wherever giving is simply and distinctly spoken of, it is Christ who is regarded as the giver. So our Lord Himself says of that which lies at the source of all, “the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water,” etc. The water here represents the Holy Ghost. Hence, He is viewed in this place as the gift and Christ is the giver. And as this is true of that great foundation-truth, namely, the presence of the Holy Ghost Himself, so is it of all the details. Christ, the Head of the Church, is dealing in the individual members according to His own gracious affection; for this is the blessed side of the truth which is held up here. “Unto each one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” He is speaking about ministerial gift; but it is called grace here because it is regarded not so much as a position of authority (though some of these gifts involve it) but of One who loves His Church and cares for each member of it; and He cannot fail to supply whatever is suitable and worthy of Himself and His love. “Unto each one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

And this leads to another remark of a general kind. The Epistle to the Corinthians gave you an ampler field in which the Holy Ghost is presented as working; you have

miracles — tongues — healings — the remarkable ways in which the Holy Ghost acts in outward power. All this is left out here. To what principle are we to attribute it? For God does nothing arbitrarily; but always with a love and wisdom worthy of Himself, and surely intended for our profit. What He has not revealed, it becomes us not to inquire; but what He has made known in His word, we are clearly free, nay bound, to seek to learn simply and thankfully. Why then have we also the more eternal operations of the Spirit in Corinthians? And why, in writing to the Ephesians, are the outward manifestations left out and only those spoken of which pertain to the growth of the soul, the founding of the Church, and the carrying of it on, the keeping up holy growth and fellowship and godly order among the children of God? For to these alone the statements of this chapter apply. The key, I believe, is found in what we have already hinted. In Corinthians the prominent thought is the Holy Ghost present in the Church, and whatever He does comes before us. And as the Holy Ghost may work in an extraordinary manner and is the power of that which is sensibly supernatural as well as of that which meets the wants of the soul, hence all is brought before us there. But in Ephesians, where Christ is viewed in immediate relationship to His Church, and where it is His love and the care for the members of His body which flows out of that love, it is plain that whatever merely deals with the world and is a witness to unbelievers would be not needed but superfluous: only that which has to do with the members of Christ is in place and season. Oh that we only had more patience and confidence in God and His word! We should find the answer to every difficulty in due time. God owns the heart’s reliance upon Him. By examining a particular part in the light of the whole

book where it occurs, how often we discern that which gives us the right clue to its meaning.

But before looking at the gifts themselves, I would just draw attention to what is of still deeper interest and importance, the basis on which the giving of these gifts by Christ depends. For we have all suffered immensely from mere traditional views of ministry, regarding it as in general an honourable profession among men, or a certain position which has a status attached to it. These things entirely falsify the nature of ministry; and the consequence is that the full blessing and meaning of the word are so far lost for the soul. Do not mistake me. I deny not that God works where much is unscriptural. He is always right, and the failure of the Church, or of ourselves individually, cannot touch His sovereign goodness, who always watches over all and each member of Christ for blessing. But then He allows failure to show itself and permits that we should suffer the consequence of it to humble us and make us feel that all the good is from Him, that all the evil is on our part. Throughout the whole history of Christendom appear these two things: — man corrupting his way upon the earth, and God showing Himself above the evil that His light judges. This is true of ministry as it is of all else.

Hence if we turn to Scripture and see the ground on which ministry rests, we shall find that nothing can be more glorious; but, alas! nothing more contrary to that which ordinarily is its form among men. For its basis is not short of the redemption that Christ has accomplished by His blood, and of His ascension to heaven. Christian ministry flows from Christ at the right hand of God; it did not exist before. I do not deny that

God had His ways of acting in Israel. But there His dealings partook more of the character of priesthood, from which ministry differs totally in character. Earthly priesthood is a caste of men who deal with God on behalf of those for whom they are priests: that is, they undertake the spiritual business of persons unable for one reason or another to transact it with God directly, and consequently dependent upon these mediators between God and them. The priest goes where the people cannot go, enters the holy place, presents the blood, burns the incense, deals with God in short for each spiritual want of those whom he represents. Ministry starts upon quite different ground, being an action, through man, from God toward men, and not from man toward God. The two are clean contrasts of each other. As to the servant of God, if truly one whom God raises up, who has a message from Him and a work to do for Him, that message or work is by God's authority for the blessing of men. Hence, if you take an evangelist, what is he? One who, himself taught of God for his own soul's need, not only knows the way to be saved, but has a power, which he did not possess before, given him of Christ, to act upon the souls of others. Every Christian ought to be able to confess truth, to confess Christ; yet this does not make one an evangelist, but so to state the gospel as to act powerfully on souls, specially of the unconverted, and thus awaken, clear, or establish in the grace of God. The spiritual action is by the Holy Ghost; but it is from God and His beloved Son, Christ our Lord, toward man. Thus, the gift, under the Lord's hand, is exercised in love of souls to seek their good, and implies or is rather power from above to act upon them.

Take again the gift of teaching. There you have another form of the power of God. Many understand the truth for their own souls' enjoyment, but they cannot help others: they are unable to put the truth so convincingly before believers, or so to deal with the affections, as to carry home the truth with energy to the soul. Where this is done, there is the gift of teaching. But I have only referred to it for the purpose of contrasting the nature of priesthood with ministry, and of showing that the confusion of the two things is a lamentable consequence of the state of the Church. If people go to hear a sermon, they say they go to worship. Men are so habituated to confound teaching with worship that the two things are supposed each to involve the other.

I admit there is such a thing as Christian priesthood: still ministry is wholly distinct. All Christians, without exception, men, women, and children, are priests; for the priest is one who has a divine call and qualification, which gives him access to the presence of God. Priesthood, in a word, gives the title of the soul to draw near to God. This is always its distinguishing character. On the other hand, ministry in the word is a varied service; but it is only by particular members of the body that Christ thus acts for the good of all. Hence while priesthood is universal, and no person can be a Christian without being a priest, it is only a few among the many who are what Scripture calls ministers of the word or public servants of Christ. I am not speaking of the vague sense in which all ought to be serving Christ every day of their lives; but the question now is of proper ministry in the word; and it is plain that all have not the power to preach the word of God profitably for the souls of others. The great mass of God's children require to have the

path of God pointed out and difficulties removed, the right handling of which things depends upon, or constitutes, ministry in one form or another.

Ministry, then, as said before, is from God to man; priesthood is from man to God. When we meet to worship God, it is an exercise not of ministry, but of priesthood. Perhaps one or more of the persons who take part in it might be ministers; but for the moment they are not ministering, but worshipping. Worship is the exercise of christian priesthood, the offering up of praise and thanksgiving. This is from man towards God — it is the direction of priesthood. Hence where there is an outflow of praise and thanksgiving, you have the highest character of priesthood. Intercession and prayer are a lower form, though intercession be blessed indeed, because it takes up the wants of others. But, strictly speaking, worship rather consists of praise and thanksgiving. Hence it is that the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, forms so central a part of christian worship. It is that which most powerfully, and in solemn joy, calls out our souls in the remembrance of Jesus and thanksgiving to God. And hence, though, of course, the taking the bread and wine cannot be regarded as in itself worship, yet it is that which acts upon the soul and draws out the heart, by the Holy Ghost, in the worship of God. Where the Lord's Supper is regarded as a means of grace, persons repair to it for comfort, or at least the hope of it. It is never so presented in the word of God. On the contrary, if the communicants did not enter into the mind of God in the Supper (i.e., did not discern the Lord's body), it became a means of judgment to them. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's

body.” By this were meant not spurious Christians, but Christians ever so real, who were taking the Lord’s Supper in a light spirit and without self-judgment. Where a soul, therefore, is walking in known sin, and comes to the table of the Lord, the effect is that the hand of the Lord is stretched out in one way or another, and it is impossible to escape when thus trifling with God. Again, if one put himself outside to avoid this, he is proclaiming his own sin and practically excommunicating himself. Thus, there is nothing for a soul but to go straight forward and to look up to God for grace to watch against sin, yea, the least risings of it, and in self-judgment to lean on the Lord who alone can strengthen us to walk worthily of Him. To such an one the word is, “So let him eat;” it is not, Let him stay away; but let him judge himself and come.

These two things, then, worship and ministry, ought never to be jumbled together. There may be a word spoken at the table of the Lord, helping on communion; but this can scarcely be called the ordinary exercise of ministry. A regular discourse there would be, I conceive, most irregular: it would distract from the prime object which the Lord intends. There may be the unfolding of the affections of Christ, or in particular circumstances there might be even more, such as one visiting for a limited time, as when Paul continued his discourse till midnight. But the Lord’s Supper having no connection with ministry, but rather with the members of Christ remembering their Lord, and with their worship coming together to praise Him, it is plain that the formal exercise of ministry, properly speaking, finds its place elsewhere, not at the table of the Lord. A brief word that would awaken the soul’s affections and gather them up

to Christ whom we are remembering, is most comely and seasonable, if the Lord so give; but it is important to see the scriptural place, and order, and aim of the two things. In ministry you have the Lord providing for the spiritual supply of His people's wants. And on what is this founded? Upon the fact that Christ has gone on high as Head, having first put away sin and glorified God on earth; and from His present seat of heavenly glory He is communicating the needed gifts. By what title has Christ taken His place? Not as God, nor simply as man. Neither did Christ enter into the presence of God, because Satan had not been able to touch Him, when tempted in all points. There was a still more solemn scene — the great hour for which He came — the bearing of sin — the cross, where He made Himself chargeable with every failure, with my sins and with your sins. He has done so. Christ has only taken His place at the right hand of God on the ground of His having put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Upon this basis ministry is founded. God's righteous judgment has been borne and vindicated; sin and Satan are completely vanquished for us by Christ. The testimony of divine grace, yea, the fulness of it, can be the portion of the believer now without hindrance. The victory for God in behalf of the most guilty sinners is won. And Christ has taken His place in the highest seat of heaven as the victorious man. As such He has carried humanity to the throne of God, and is there, as man, set down far above all angels, principalities, and powers. From thence it is that He gives these gifts.

Christian ministry, therefore, owes its very origin to this — the full remission of sins on God's part and the heavenly glorification of man in Christ's person. They are fruits and witnesses of complete victory. Yet is it all

and only made known to faith, save so far as miracles once were a sign to unbelievers. What is the consequence? Man goes on in sin. Satan still roams about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The judgment of God is hanging over the world. What then is the value of the death of Christ, and of His victory? Immense, but immense only for those who believe in Christ; and, therefore, in the midst of this ruined world, and while sin and Satan are there, the judgment of God impending, there is this wonderful link between Him who is at the right hand of God and those who were once poor, lost sinners in the sight of God. He sends down gifts; He calls out this one and that one, and makes them to be the witnesses of His power, who has won all this and more; who has, in short, left nothing undone that is needed for the glory of God and the blessing of man. The world hears the sound only to slight the good news, and even the child of God sees it dimly if he reasons about it; but if I believe what God tells me His beloved Son has done, I ought to know that all these things are gone as between my soul and God with as simple a certainty as if they had never existed at all. I ought to be as sure that sin is blotted out, as if I had been guilty of none — that Satan is as thoroughly judged as if he were in the lake of fire — that God's righteous judgment is completely stayed, and that nothing but His grace remains for me. It is true of all His children. It is the only thing that becomes a Christian, because it is what God provides for him. God does not own christian people in their trouble or hesitation whether all is finished for them. To doubt that all which Christ undertook is settled in their favour, is practically to deny redemption; and if all this is done and accepted, what more can I want? Did not Christ know better than

myself what was needed? Did not God feel what was due to His holiness more than you or I? And yet He who was and is God said, “It is finished.” Who or what am I to doubt it? To Christ, therefore, I owe it to bear this witness.

Ministry is founded upon Christ’s work and exaltation. There were the twelve and the seventy sent out, no doubt, before Christ went up to the right hand of God, but their mission during the days of Christ’s flesh is excluded from Ephesians 4. Apostles are mentioned of course, but not in virtue of their call while He was the Messiah on earth. On the contrary, “when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” Not that those who had been appointed apostles when Christ was here below, were not also brought into this new place, Judas excepted; but that their being apostles of the Church is founded upon their having this gift of Christ after He had ascended on high. Therefore it is here said, “He gave some apostles.” Why had there been twelve? In relation to the twelve tribes of Israel; and so, when our Lord sent them out, He forbade them to go into any city of the Gentiles. But the apostles of the Church, are they sent only to the Jews? Every one knows that it is not so. After Christ was crucified, the links with Israel were broken. The rejected, suffering Son of man ascends to heaven, and from His heavenly glory He sends down the Holy Ghost, and calls out from the world in sovereign grace, constitutes members of His body, and endows with power to serve Him in whatever way seems good to Himself.

Hence what is called succession, is completely disposed of. In Jewish priesthood there was successional order, and all earthly ministry forms itself on this model. But

christian ministry is not of human appointment, but divine in the fullest sense; and therefore the whole source of man's thoughts on the subject is a manifest and total fallacy. Are we to abandon the clear word of God for the passing opinions of men? If so, I shall never know any certainty at all. The Dissenter will say a church must call a man to be their minister. He may have and be a ministerial gift from Christ; but what makes a man to be their minister is their own call. Thus, it is founded on a particular church electing whom they please to be their particular minister. He is their choice and therefore their minister. But what if there be no such thing in Scripture? What if such an idea be foreign to the word of God? There is not even a hint of it to be found there. We have the appointment of men to take care of the funds and of the poor, and this with the concurrence of the assembly. No person ought to undertake such a work unless he have the just feeling of satisfaction in the whole christian assembly. The Church gives what she can, and therefore is entitled by God to say who shall take care of their trust; that is, who shall transact the outward business of the Church. But in spiritual gifts, in teaching, preaching, exhorting, ruling, can the Church give? Clearly not. The word of God contains nowhere such a notion as the Church choosing or appointing, except in such gifts as the Church can confer. The Church gives money, and can appoint persons to administer it. The Church does not give ministerial gifts, and has no title nor room to interfere. Who has? It is Christ alone who gives, as we find here: "According to the measure of the gift of Christ." "When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men: some apostles, some prophets." This excludes even the true Church of God from any claim of power to appoint; and

if it be examined, you will see how the scriptural history agrees with and confirms the principle. Who but the Lord chose Matthias? Who appointed Peter or the rest? Who addressed the multitude on the day of Pentecost? It could not be the Church, for the Church was only formed on that day. Peter preached, and by his preaching the Church was gathered. It was the Lord thus brought such as should be saved; so that ministry precedes the Church, as the atonement and ascension of Christ precede ministry. The Lord from on high calls the vessels of His grace, communicates power, leads forward by His Spirit's guidance, working by and controlling all circumstances, so that His servants shall be more or less faithfully doing His work. The consequence is, souls are gathered and the Church is formed. Thus ministry in the word never flows from the Church, but from Christ, and the Church is the result. Ministry is therefore antecedent to the Church, instead of being founded on its authority. Hence it is that you have not only the dissenting principle of popular election entirely put aside, but every other human device. It was not the apostles, but Christ who gave gifts. And has He ceased to give them? Is He at the right hand of God still? Then, I ask, is He there as the Head of the Church? Does He not remain now as perfectly and efficaciously the Head of the Church as before the day of Pentecost? Then He was there, bringing the Church into being; and now He is there, to perpetuate the Church and supply all its need. It is as impossible, therefore, for ministry to fail as for Christ to leave the right hand of God before the body is complete. But He is there as the giver of all needful gifts; and the exercise of these gifts is what we call ministry.

But if we look further, there is a most magnificent parenthesis of the apostle on this subject. “Therefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.” That is, He led those captive who had led the Church captive. We were led captive of the devil, and Christ going up on high passed triumphantly above the power of Satan. The fallen spirits were completely defeated and by Christ as man. Man has conquered Satan in the person of Christ, and we can look up as those that are one with Him who has defeated Satan. We ought never to treat with Satan as if he had power against us. We are entitled always to bid a detected Satan depart from us. We may and should always resist him: and we are told that, if so, he will depart from us; not because we are strong, but because He to whom we belong has gotten Him the victory by death and has given it to us. “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth.” This supposes the glory of His person. He that is gone up is the One that first came down.

It is indeed the constant principle of God; He is always the first to come down. We require to be lifted up and have nothing of our own to come down from. Christ, being God, was the only man who had glory proper to Himself and above all creaturehood. He descended first into the lower parts of the earth. His very humiliation is the proof of His own personal dignity. From His natural supremacy, so to speak, He descends first to do His work here below. “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.” Thus we have here a most magnificent sight of our Saviour. The Holy Ghost gives us in two short verses

the grand sweep of His glory and triumph, who condescended to be a man and a servant. He that is gone up now is the same that first came down, and who only would go up again into glory when He had completely put away all that must have for ever kept us from Him. But He came down to put it away and would not return on high till it was done. He so loved us, with a love according to the glorious counsels of God, that our sins, gross and fatal as they were, only gave Him the opportunity to show what God is, and is to us, in His own person. And now it is a question of God's righteousness, not only to Him but to us, because of Him. What a difference" He might come down in love, but that of itself would not give us a place in the presence of God; but He is gone up in righteousness; and this is the reason why our Lord says that, when the Spirit was come, He should convince the world of righteousness, "because I go to the Father." You have the full display of righteousness now in Christ seated at the right hand of God. Righteousness toward Him in this world was nowhere found, but the foulest wrong and indignity. Where must I look for it? At the right hand of God. I see One there to whom God, with reverence be it spoken, is indebted for the display and vindication of His moral glory, to whom He owes the only adequate exhibition of all that which manifested and maintained His character before men, even in the man Christ Jesus. God never had His character at all fully retrieved since sin came into the world till Christ died on the cross. When His blood was shed for the glory of God and the deliverance of man, God shone out in a new light before this world. God was no longer regarded as the hard master that Satan's lie misrepresented Him to be. The veil was rent; the truth could no longer be hid that there was no proof

of love the creature could have asked of God but what God had surpassed it in His Son, dead, risen, and glorified above. Up to the death of Christ God's righteousness must have destroyed every creature that had a sin upon it. Now, on the contrary, it is the righteousness of God to justify me, a believer, though I have been a vile sinner; and for this reason, that, although my sins in the one scale must have sunk myself alone down to hell, yet there was, in the other scale, Christ and His blood far outweighing all and raising me up to heaven. What is the consequence? My sins are clean vanished before that precious blood, and the scale of Christ proves itself to be the only one that keeps its weight before God. Upon this now hangs the very righteousness of God. It is no longer a question of legal righteousness; but now He has Christ, and this is what God owes to Christ's obedience unto death, even the death of the cross; by virtue of which God righteously clears the guilty, which, as dealing according to the law, He could by no means do. "By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." What was known of God in creation contained no provision for sin; what was known of Him under the law would have only blasted the smallest hope of the sinner. Whereas now, the more I see what God is in Christ's cross, the more confidence and peace I have. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

We see, then, in these verses, the heavenly source of ministry. It is not a position which, according to God, gives importance in the world. The labourer, we all know, is worthy of his hire. But do you not see that the Apostle Paul would not use the title to support that the

gospel gave him? He would not have what he calls his confident boasting made nothing of; for though he had power, he preferred to work with his own hands rather than be burdensome. And this is the wonderful liberty of grace: under it there is nothing we cannot do, except sin. But though all things are lawful, they are not all expedient; and, no doubt, it was in the wisdom of God that the great apostle did what many servants of Christ would be ashamed to do. What a fearful declension there is from the whole spirit as well as letter of Christianity! How complete the change from the character of the gospel, that men — Protestants or Catholics, Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Methodists — should alike consider as a blot and matter of censure that which was the boast of the apostle? There was a weighty principle involved in his conduct. He received a gift from the Philippians; help was sent to him in prison as well as out. He desired fruit that might abound to the account of the saints. If the apostle had not occasionally received from them, it would have been loss to their souls. Christianity does not mean that saints should use for themselves what they owe to God, and what grace loves to do for all and any one. But the apostle never acted either so that it could be said that he served himself by the gospel, or that he was indifferent to the saints. God took care that it should be so in Paul’s case. The smaller gifts there would have been the danger of despising. But the gracious effort of the apostle was to maintain the less; the greater less needed his ample shield. But where any gave themselves up to gospel service, the apostle takes the utmost care to affirm their title to live of the gospel. Let those who so live take care that in this they serve the Lord Christ.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets.” I apprehend that the apostles and prophets are clearly what might be called the foundation gifts, such as God used for the purpose of laying a broad and deep platform on which the Church was to be built. This was done by those whom God empowered in a special manner. The apostles and prophets were the two classes that first of all entered as instruments into the calling of the Church of God. Evangelists were at work from early days, also pastors soon after. But the first two, apostles and prophets, were peculiar in their full force to the original laying down of the Church of God. There is no ground to suppose that, in the strict sense, apostles and prophets were meant to continue, or do so in fact, though something analogous to an apostle may be raised up at fitting times. Take Luther, for instance. There was a partial recall of the saints of God generally to fundamental truth, which had been long lost sight of. This answers, in a little measure, to what an apostle did. A prophet, again, was one who not merely expounded the Scriptures, but who so brought home the truth as immediately to connect the soul with God.

At the very beginning, men of God appeared who were not apostles, nor necessarily inspired communicators of truth, such as Mark and Luke; but prophets, like Judas and Silas. (Acts 15:32.) The Scriptures were not all written when the Church began, nor were the apostles everywhere. God, therefore, raised up prophets, who, in certain cases at least, were the means of revelation. And why is it that we have not such channels now? Because revelation is complete: we have the word of God, and want no word more. To suppose another revelation now, would be to impair what we have; so that the need for

these prophets in the highest sense is closed with the canon of Scripture. In a subordinate sense, what would answer to the prophetic work in question is the revival of truth and powerful action on saints at large by recalling what was once revealed, but completely evaporated. Take, for instance, the capital point of the coming of the Lord as the hope of the Church. This truth has suffered a long and almost total eclipse. Within our own day it has again shone out with a certain measure of power from God. In what writing, since the days of the apostles, do you find the nature and calling of the Church set forth? where the unfolding of the Church's hope — the Lord's coming to receive the Church and to give it a heavenly place? These truths had slipped away from the minds of men, until recovered within the last thirty or forty years. Justification by faith had been partially known by Augustine and Bernard. The Waldenses possessed great faithfulness but not clear doctrine. But the nature of the Church as the body of Christ, and the character of the Christian's hope, were most completely lost sight of, as far as I am aware. They had vanished from the Church. And it seems to me that the recovery of these truths resembles prophetic work in this particular, though one might hesitate to call any used in the work either an apostle or a prophet.

When we come to the next classes of gifts, namely, "evangelists, pastors, and teachers," it is plain that we have these still at work, more or less, in the present broken state; and not confined to these believers or those, but distributed throughout, as the Lord pleases. Men confound ministry with local charges. It may be said, that I have slurred over a part of Scripture — the apostles laying their hands on the elders, etc. With the

most entire recollection of it, let me say that elders are not the same thing as ministers. Ministry is the exercise of a gift from Christ; elders were appointed by men, but never except by apostles or apostolic delegates, such as Titus was. How do we stand with reference to that question now? Where are the men who are duly authorized to appoint elders today? Do you know any better than I where they are to be found? Some people, no doubt, pretend to the power of appointment, but the pretension does not make their appointing valid. In civil things, if one man were without full authority to appoint another to be a magistrate, he would run the risk of being punished severely. Is it possible that in the things of God interference with the authority of our Lord is of less moment? It is not, that some sections have apostles and some have not, for no one has them more than another. I do not see that much is gained by assuming to do the work of an apostle, where it is only assumption. It is surely more humble not to pretend to apostolic work, if we are not apostles. We cannot legitimately ordain elders, because we want for it apostolic authority. Is it not most in accordance with the lowliness that becomes us, to abide within the limits of our powers? I do not admit that any one living is entitled to choose elders, or anything else of the sort, because there is neither an apostle nor an apostolic man commissioned by the Lord for the purpose. If men assume to ordain, they should prove their title.

But ministry and eldership are not the same thing; they are almost always confounded, but they differ totally. These two things are found in Scripture: local charges, duly ordained by apostles or their delegates; and ministerial gifts, which never required human

authentication. In Scripture, no person was ever chosen to be an apostle, nor called to be a prophet or an evangelist, except by Christ. It was precisely the same with pastors and teachers, as we see in our chapter; and why should it not be the same still? Christ has not vacated His office; and it is His office to call and give pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc. But there is another principle quite distinct from that involved in these gifts, namely, that Christ warranted the apostles to act in the way of authority. In virtue of this, they appointed persons to be elders or deacons, as the case might be. We cannot do what apostles did unless we are clothed with like authority; but we have Christ ever abiding the immediate giver of ministerial gifts: this is always true. Ministry does not and never did depend upon apostles or the Church, but upon Christ; and therefore it cannot lapse. But as the appointment of elders, according to Scripture, hung upon the apostles, and as there are no apostles now, the rightful power to appoint elders is necessarily and evidently at an end. Scripture may intimate the continuance of gift, but not of authority to ordain. Elders, or rather officials, of the various religious bodies abound; but what is their appointment (I do not say their gifts) worth? Let any one that knows the Bible, say whether I am treating fairly this weighty matter according to the word of God.

The question, then, for us now is, Are we carrying out the will of God? Many have a notion that there is some special value in a human rite of ordination in making a man a minister. But in the days of the apostles themselves, no one ever thought of being appointed to preach the gospel. If a person could preach, he was bound to do it; if he did not, he was like the slothful

servant, hiding his talent. If a man took the ground of having a right to preach or to speak in the assembly, you may safely deny his right. None but God has a right to proclaim glad tidings to the world, or to speak to His assembly by whom He will. He, therefore, may call men and put them forward, one to do this work and another to do that work. And here comes in the searching question, Is the Lord to be acknowledged honestly and thoroughly as the Head over His own Church? In ministry, properly so styled, it is not a question of men appointing men, but whether Christ is allowed to be the Head of His own Church. Do not, then, acknowledge that it is the Church's business to appoint ministers in the word. The Church is not my Lord, but Christ; and we ought never to put the Church in the place of Christ. This has been one of the main and most mischievous sources of Popery.

It follows that we ought to acknowledge all those the Lord appoints. If a man preaches the truth in this or that body, I am not to ignore, but own the servants of Christ everywhere. They may not thoroughly carry out the truth; but in all cases it is not the brethren, but Christ who gives gifts. But does it follow that I am to go to mass, even if a Romish priest preaches a measure of truth? I must examine whether he who may be ever so real a servant of Christ, is doing the will of God in the matter. We are not called to follow this or that one, except so far as they follow Christ. We are called on to do the will of God; and "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Nothing, therefore, can be more simple than the path of the Christian. Let him value the servants of Christ in their place, but not necessarily all that they are doing, unless it be according to the will of

God. But is it not said that we are to obey them who have the rule over us? Yes, and it is as true now as ever it was. But supposing you are converted to God and there is a priest of Rome who says that you must obey those who have the rule over you, and that they have this rule, am I not to question what he means and what he is using the text for? Is it to induce me to disobey God? If so, am I not to say, I “must obey God rather than man?” Thus a path always appears for the saint of God who desires to do His will, and that path is simply obedience. It may sometimes take the form of what mistaken or self-willed men might call disobedience; but certainly it will be the obeying of God rather than man. Nothing can absolve us from the positive. invariable duty of obeying God.

This will show that whatever may be the value of ministry, it was never intended to bind down the children of God, and to make it a question of mere blind acquiescence. Ministry, where it is true, manifests what is the will of God wherever there is a simple mind. It puts the truth in so convincing a way as to bring the conscience into the light, making it feel its responsibility to follow that light. If you do a thing merely because a minister of God says it, influence is at work and not the power of the Spirit of God. Christian obedience is neither the blind leading the blind, nor the seeing leading the blind; but the seeing leading the seeing. Every believer has power in the Spirit to see the mind of God for himself; and he who is called of God to the place of guiding others will, as a general rule, be enabled to bring the mind of God so completely to bear upon the conscience that the simple-hearted cannot but see it. But let us remember that it is serious for any one to

acknowledge the truth and not to follow it. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

I have already explained that the first two of these classes of gifts brought before us in verse 11, had for their aim the originating of a new work and testimony. They were destined for, and employed in, laying a foundation for that previously unknown building, the assembly gathered in one out of Jews and Gentiles in the confession of Jesus, the Son of God. The apostles were used not merely like the prophets as the inspired communicators of the mind of God which had not been before revealed, but also as invested with authority in the Lord’s name. Hence there was a competent governing power, as well as a sure medium of communication from God to man. The prophets as such had nothing to do with government, properly so called. They did not visit as authoritative agents (1 Cor. 4, 11; 2 Cor. 12, 2 Cor. 13), nor did they lay down institutions here and there for regulating the Church as the apostles did. (See 1 Cor. 7:17.)

Nevertheless, the prophet was used in what was of the deepest importance, in bringing out directly and immediately from God truth that had never till then been known or even disclosed. They were, consequently, connected very specially with the revelation of truth, it might be by word of mouth or by writings; and this is the meaning of Romans 16:26. Any one who is able to examine the language which the Holy Ghost employed, will see that the expression is not strictly “the writings of the prophets,” but prophetic writings. These refer exclusively to the New Testament Scriptures, which were not all of them written by apostles. Two of the gospels were not apostolic, but they are just as much

inspired as if they were. This is as true also of the oral instruction that was given in the apostolic days. For the Church began before any part of the New Testament was written. The misuse of this fact is a favourite argument of those who contend for a sort of inspiration in the Church. They insist that the Scriptures are not so essential as we allege. But I answer, that if the Church at first had the presence of inspired men, the Church afterwards had the holy deposit of the apostles and prophets committed to writing, under the perfect guard of the Spirit of God. Here, then, we have the only standard of divine truth: the Old Testament being the original revelation of God as given to Israel — the New Testament being that supplement of His truth which is necessary to the Church. But before the canon of Scripture was closed or even begun, it is evident there was needed a class of men who should bring out the mind of God in the rising difficulties of the Church. This was supplied in the apostles and prophets. It appears that, among the saints at Corinth, there were such persons as prophets.

Hence we have a remarkable word in 1 Corinthians 14, that I would advert to for a moment. The Spirit of God laid down there as a rule (ver. 29) that in case any one were speaking in an ordinary way in the assembly, if a revelation were given to another, the latter was entitled to stop the former, and to bring in the revelation. Persons may reply, Supposing you had such a thing now, there would be confusion. But I answer, God is no longer now giving new revelations. While you had the state of things in which the full unfolding of the mind of God was not given, and while there were these inspired persons on the earth, God maintained His right, even to interrupt

a person by a communication of some fresh truth from Himself. But now, if any person were to plead a fresh revelation from God, he would only prove himself deluded if not an impostor. We have the full communication and standard of God's mind, now that these inspired persons have passed away. Thus the Church is cast, not upon apostles and prophets, but upon the written word of God as a criterion. Of course, there are the more ordinary means that the Spirit of God used then and still uses — gifts just as really as apostles and prophets, but not of the same authoritative character in action as apostles, nor having the title to communicate new revelations like the prophets. Now everything is subordinate as compared with these. Whatever measure of authority there may be at present must prove itself to be from God in its character and end; and it must not pretend to be some fresh revelation of the divine mind, but the right use or application of what has already been given.

On the other hand, the gifts which the Holy Ghost still raises up for the good of the Church, are here called evangelists, and pastors, and teachers. These are not the only gifts that abide, for Scripture in no single passage gives, as men would like, a complete list of them. We must search all Scripture. And a wholesome, blessed thing it is for us, that we never can find anything complete from the word of God, by merely examining some particular part of it. God necessitates our searching His word through and through, in order to get at His mind with any measure of fulness. Were it not so, we should be disposed to make favourites of certain portions and to leave the rest alone. This is the reason why many Christians practically neglect a large part of

the word of God, as if it no longer applied. On this very subject of ministry there is a great deal of ignorance and infidelity at the present moment. The idea is that you have merely sanctified intellect. Now, I admit, God gives and forms intellectual power. That is what is called in Scripture “the ability.” But examine our Lord’s parable where He alludes to this very thing, and you will find that He distinguishes between “the gift” and “the ability” — “He gave to every man according to his several ability.” God in calling men to serve Him, even before they are converted, fashions the vessel for His purposes. His providence singles out a person from his very birth, and He orders all the circumstances of his after life. Perhaps he is educated as a priest, or as a lawyer. Thus Paul so thoroughly knew all the resources of self-righteousness that he could fall back upon grace, and judge what it is that man’s righteousness loves, lives in, and leads to. His own experience proved that even when cultivated to the highest degree, it issues in direct antagonism to the Lord of glory. Still you have in Paul a most remarkable natural character, as well as no ordinary training and acquirements. All this was providentially ordered in Saul of Tarsus; but besides, when called by the grace of God, a gift was put into him, that he did not possess before, a capacity by the Holy Ghost of laying hold of the truth, and of enforcing it on people’s souls. God wrought through his natural character, and his manner of utterance, and particular style of writing, but everything, though flowing through his natural ability, in this new power of the Holy Ghost communicated to his soul. Thus there are these two things, the ability which is the vessel of the gift, and the gift itself which is, under the Lord, the directing energy

of the ability. There is no such thing as gift apart from the vessel in which the gift acts.

But now let me make another remark. In this epistle the gifts are not regarded as merely spiritual powers. They are regarded as such in Romans and Corinthians, but in Ephesians they are always persons. He gave apostles — not merely the apostolic gifts. I find the gift of teaching in Romans and the gift of a teacher in Ephesians. The two truths are perfectly harmonious. There is a divine reason for the difference, which seems to be this. In Ephesians the love of Christ to the Church is the key-note to the whole epistle — it is the fulness of blessing which Christ's body, the Church, has by virtue of union with the Head. What acts upon the affections of the Church is not a mere power. You can love, not a power, but a person; and a person through whom the gift flows evidently acts upon the affections of those for whose good it is used. All through the epistle it is Christ, and not (save exceptionally) the Spirit. In Corinthians the Holy Spirit is made prominent. Here it is Christ; and in accordance with this, you have these persons who act from Christ for the good of His body. In this is a beautiful instance of the harmony of the truth of God. The active love of Christ is represented in this epistle as the spring of all the blessing of the Church; and so with the personal gifts of Christ, whom He Himself loves, and uses to keep up His own love in others.

The difference between the evangelists and the pastors and teachers is obvious. The evangelist is the ordinary means of gathering souls to Christ. It may be said as a gift to be wandering in its own nature; not confined to one spot, but called to be here and there wherever the Lord by the Spirit might lead him out for the need of

souls. Timothy, who has been by clerical sleight of hand metamorphosed into an archbishop, is called in Scripture an “evangelist.” He was marked out by prophecy to a particular work, and a certain gift was communicated to him through the apostle, accompanied by presbyters. He goes at the apostle’s command to a certain place, and there he takes a cognizance of things. But neither he nor Titus were stationary, like a modern diocesan. Still less was there a provision made for successors. Timothy was to commit what he had heard from the apostle to faithful men who should be able to teach others also; that is, the charge concerns the conveyance of truth, not of authority or holy orders, as men perversely say.

The fact is, that a plurality of bishops were appointed in every Church where there was a certain number of saints gathered together — at least, after a certain time of testing and experience. They were chosen there by an apostle, or one commissioned by the apostles. As it is usurpation for gifted individuals to discharge the functions of the Church, so it is equally usurpation for the Church to assume the functions of the individual gifts. Of course, if there were anything immoral in the conduct of a servant of Christ, he is as much responsible as any other, and more so. The children of God and himself are bound to watch with holy jealousy, because his sin would bring a greater shame and scandal upon the name of Christ than a less conspicuous member of the body. But, except in matters of a moral nature, in the exercise of his ministry, there ought not to be the slightest interference between him and the Master who has called him to serve Him. Herein dissent is thoroughly and radically unsound, because the Church

is supposed to appoint a minister, and, of course, has the power to discharge him if they like. This makes the minister to be the minister of their church; but Scripture never speaks, as all do now, of the minister of a particular church. There is no such thing as “our” and “your” minister. What Scripture shows us is, that all gifts are gifts in the unity of the body of Christ. If a man is a pastor or teacher at all, he is set as pastor or teacher in the whole Church. As far as this goes, it matters not where he may be; wherever he goes, he has a call, if walking scripturally, not from a congregation but from Christ, to exercise his ministry fearlessly, of course humbly, and not pretending to more than he has got. For a person setting up for more generally destroys credit even for what he possesses; and, in general, the tendency of the children of God is not to discredit ministry, but to give an undue place to it. But Satan, who is always working to dislocate the means of helping the body on, stirs up the saints to give credit where they ought not, to be captious and to discredit where they ought to be thankful. All these things require to be regulated by the word. The thoughts of men in general are founded upon the Old Testament and not upon the New: hence the notion of ministry being a kind of honourable profession, or something known as a title in the world. But if we examine such a portion as this, or all others in the epistles, it will soon appear that there never was such a thing recognized in the world as an apostle, etc. They were despised by the world. Peter was not more honoured in his day in the world after he became an apostle than he was before. The world might recognize that he wrought miracles, which is another thing altogether. Many fleshly men wrought great miracles. In Corinth they were mere babes in

understanding, because they were so taken up with miracles and the display of external gifts. They liked, too, to hear themselves talk; and the apostle shows that to bring out even a few words for the good of the Church, was far higher and better than any signs and wonders they performed. He could work more miracles than they all, yet he says he would rather speak five words with his understanding “that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” Thus, if the Church is shorn of the miraculous powers which strike the eye of the unbeliever, what is even more important abides, save the fundamental gifts, which did not require to be continued.

The foundation was so perfectly laid that apostles and prophets are not needed. This is intimated here. The Spirit of God does not prepare the saints for the long continuance of things in this world. Christ gave “some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” The believers in those days could not have known but that the whole work of the Church was to be completed in that very generation: there is no such idea as a succession taught here, though now we may see it is implied. Ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift; and these gifts depend upon Christ always abiding the Head of the Church, never terminating His office as a high priest might, whose office would devolve upon some successor by reason of death. But Christ is in heaven

after resurrection, and these apostles are what He gave when He ascended on high. We stand so far on the same ground now as they did upon the day of Pentecost. Christ had left the world then, and it was thence that He gave these gifts here described. The Holy Ghost abides in the Church, and by the Holy Ghost He empowers men on earth for whatever the Church may need. We have evangelists, the great agents the Lord uses for recruiting His spiritual army. Then we have pastors and teachers whom the Lord raises up and gives for the purpose of leading on and guiding and ruling those saints of God who are brought in. All these gifts abide as much as ever. I am not speaking of measure of power, for things are weak indeed; but inasmuch as they depend upon Christ above and the Holy Ghost below, and as Christ never can cease to be Head there and the Holy Ghost does not leave the Church here, these gifts necessarily abide also. So it is added, “Till we all come in the unity of the faith.” There is no divine warrant for the continuance of miracles, but it is implied for the continuance of these edification-gifts for the good of souls.

Our Lord, then, gave these gifts “till we all come.” It does not say He will give them, because the early Church was set in the posture of expecting the Lord Jesus Christ again. Paul and the other apostles directed the saints to be always looking out for Christ. There was no intimation that Christ must come, but they were to expect Him constantly. Hence, there is no such thing in connection with ministry as preparing for a long lapse of ages. But Christ is at the right hand of God, supplying what is necessary. “He gave some..... till we all come in the unity of the faith.” If Christ had come in the

apostolic generation, this would have been true. Christ has delayed; but it abides true, “till we all come.” So that, with the exceptions already stated, we are warranted to expect a perpetuation of ministry of the same character, and flowing from the same source, as the apostolic Church had. Whatever is necessary for the gathering in of souls, and caring for them when gathered, abides till Christ comes and completes all.

What a blessed thing it is to know that we can accept from God that ministry, which in man’s hand has been so proud or servile or both — that we can look for it from Him and recognize it as a divine thing — that we are not driven to the notion that we have only a human ministry now instead of a divine, as of old, but that we have the certainty that these gifts flow from Christ, who cannot fail in His word and work! But how are we to know a minister, an evangelist, a pastor, a teacher? I ask, How do you know a Christian? Every Christian, who is conversant with Christians, has a general idea. I do not say there is any infallible discernment of it. But although nobody can pronounce unfailingly, and we are necessarily dependent for our measure upon God’s present help, still we know as a general rule there is that in a Christian which commends itself to his brethren in general. There is that in his confession of Christ which harmonizes with the word of God more or less. The spirit, the tone, the general life and ways, after they have been a little inured to the trials of the way, may either strengthen or weaken the conviction. It is just so as to judging of ministry. And we are bound to prove all things. A person is used of God to move souls powerfully and with blessing; to gather them in and to bring them to Christ. There is an evangelist clearly. On

the other hand, you may see one whose heart does not go out so much in putting the gospel before souls, but who enjoys and loves to make others enjoy the truth of God, and to develop the character of God. Is not he a teacher? Others may know the truth of God as well, but they cannot bring it out so as to act thus upon others. But if a third person attempts to deal practically with souls and yet habitually makes grave mistakes, can I say, There is a pastor? When there are difficulties, he is at his wits' end, knowing not what to do nor advise. He may be able to explain the Bible, but when it is a question of applying it to the practical life of Christians, there are endless blunders. Again, a pastor supposes not only knowledge of the truth, but the power to urge it day by day on individuals: it involves a dealing with conscience and affection in a way that a teacher does not necessarily imply. A man might be a teacher without being a pastor (and vice versa), or he might be both. An apostle might be a teacher, and an evangelist and pastor too. You will find a particular gift in one man and another of a totally different kind in another. Again, there may be a person who cannot bring out truth powerfully, but he can exhort; he can deal with the conscience. This is an invaluable gift not alluded to here; but in Romans 12 we find it. Here are the more prominent gifts for adjusting the saints in their proper order and functions. But while I believe the indwelling Spirit of God is the only power of discerning with the measure of certainty that God pleases, whether a person is a Christian or not, and whether he has a gift or not, of course the degree of discernment depends upon our hearts being above the flesh and its activity. It demands spirituality, and this supposes self-judgment. The whole Church is responsible to judge. An evangelist might

make a mistake, thinking a person to be truly converted, and he might baptize him. But something comes out which leads the Church to refuse him. Supposing a person confessing the name of Christ and baptized seeks fellowship, the assembly of God in that place are bound to examine. No one has a right to come: who has rights now but God? We are to be under obedience instead of talking about rights. The Church then examines, and if there be a general fellowship or such a measure of satisfaction as would lead them to say, We believe that this person has received Christ, we should not be justified in refusing his profession to be a member of Christ; the person is then received into the assembly, and then comes the trial — dependence upon God after one is received. Christ is absolutely necessary for a right walk. Those even that are born of God will not be kept unless they walk in real lowliness and looking up to God.

The Spirit of God works in the assembly. One man manifests ability to preach, another to teach; some to serve the Lord in private, and others in public. What is the power for judging of these? The same Spirit of God. And after all, it is a simpler question than many imagine. Just as a human being knows the food that is good for it, whether it be a babe or a man: so is it inseparable from the saints that they should know in the main what is for their spiritual blessing. If persons are low and fleshly they will be taken with showy trash; but you will find in the main a right and sound judgment from the most matured spiritual judgment down to the mere babe. Although all are not able to point out the right thing, all who are guided of God in any measure are able to find out the value of what is ministered. And as to heresy. How can the assembly judge of false doctrine? Christ is

the standard. Whatever scripturally exalts Christ is true; whatever lowers Christ is false, and of the devil. Christ is the power of God. and the wisdom of God. But God works by means, and if there is a false teacher who brings in what is evil, there are true teachers who are able to discern it; and though he may try to wrap it up in pleasing forms, yet the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church works against Satan, and by different members He unveils and brings out the true character of the evil thing before the assembly of God, and all are able, who are walking with God, to pronounce a divine judgment upon it when once it is exposed. If we had to make a railway we should not know how to begin the work; but when the railway is made, we can tell perfectly well the use and value of it, and can judge well enough for practice whether it is a good one or not. So with the Church of God. Though all may not equally discern and expose what is evil, God gives some who can, and afterwards all readily form a judgment upon it. These gifts are indispensable to the Church as a whole, though I do not say that wherever there is an assembly of God, it is absolutely necessary for their walking together that there should be such or such persons raised up in their midst. But we can bless God for this provision for the wants of His Church, as long as He has a Church here below. The existence of the Church and of ministry rests on the same ground; they both flow from Christ’s love, and as long as we have the one we shall have the other; it is the same love of Christ that sees His body and that supplies certain members with the requisite spiritual power for the well-being of that body. All men of God, no matter where they are, acknowledge that God must have to do with ministry, and therefore the Dissenter, when he puts his vote into the urn, does not deny that the Holy

Ghost must capacitate a man to be a minister. If he was a minister before, he is, of course, a minister after; but they say we want to make him our minister. Would it not be better to drop this unscriptural form and own him as a minister of Christ always? You thus leave him on his own proper ground as one who is bound to serve God at all cost and in all ways.

I admit that we find in the word of God bishops and deacons; but they are not referred to here. It is not said that He gave some bishops and deacons. But I maintain from the Scripture that these bishops and deacons required an apostolic or quasi-apostolic appointment. Is it not becoming for us now to say that, not being apostles, we do not pretend to exercise their functions in ordaining, though we do heartily recognize men possessed of the requisite qualifications for these local offices wherever we find them?

But the prevalent system not only assumes an authority which is not really possessed, but it introduces the utmost disorder and the most guilty confusion, if we judge it by Scripture, or even by its practical results; and this too in every human association — Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Congregational. For what can be more fatal to blessing or the Lord’s glory than to see an ardent evangelist tied down to a limited sphere and vainly essaying to meet the wants of a body of Christians who need to be built up in Christ? or to know that a mature teacher, just adjoining, is compelled to abandon his proper gift, because his congregation consists almost exclusively of the unconverted? What can be more painfully calculated to hinder the Spirit of God than this network of canons, ecclesiastical etiquette, etc., which degrades ministry into the bondage of man and disposes

of souls as if they were the serfs of the soil on which they live?

On the other hand, where Scripture ground is taken with conscience toward God, things may be weak, still there is room for the Holy Ghost to enter and work by whom He will. The enemy, no doubt, has his special wiles for distracting, and, if possible, perverting those who are there; nor do any need more watchfulness and prayer, not to say humiliation. But thank God it is the arena of faith; it honours the word of God; it gives the Spirit His proper place; and it recognizes the Lordship of Christ, welcoming each member of the body where the Head has set it; and because of this, if men plead that there must be order, I ask of what sort it is to be. Is it an order of our devising or God's that you really wish? If we are subject to Scripture, we shall allow no claim, howsoever specious, to set aside the on]y order which God sanctions for His children now on earth, i.e., His assembly, guided by the Holy Ghost, present in their midst to maintain the glory of Christ and to work sovereignly by whom He will, though, of course, only for edification and with the comeliness that befits the presence of God. Disorders there may be through want of spirituality, and this on the part of gifted men as well as the ungifted. But, assuredly, Scripture is a safer and mightier rule to correct all disorders by, than the wisest regulations of men, though nothing will avail without present dependence on the Holy Ghost.

The Apostle Paul, however, whilst meeting fleshly abuses. supposes the fullest opening for every gift of the Lord within the christian assembly, subject only to His own express restrictions. (See 1 Cor. 14) If this was God's order then, when did it cease? or has the Church

of God no longer divine landmarks for its public services? I cannot envy those who, abandoning God's system for one of their adoption or invention, do not scruple nevertheless to cite scraps here and there, such as verse 33, 40, to support human arrangements directly opposed to both letter and spirit of the inspired word from which they are so abruptly taken. What God has laid down for the Church's worship and service, is and ought to be as obligatory on the conscience as that which He has written for our individual walk and conversation. In a certain sense, indeed, it seems to me that public corporate disobedience is even more insulting to God than any individual's failure, grave as this may be. And what is the present state of Christendom? God's people, with the world mixed up together, have departed from the word of God. I do not speak of them as men or of moral duties; but the Spirit of God is not allowed His own proper place in the assembly, or even its members individually. His power is not owned as a divine person come down not merely to convert sinners, but to be the guide of the christian assembly. How is it everywhere with the meetings of the Church (nay, does it meet at all as such?) and with the exercise of the gifts of Christ in the assembly of God, separate from the world? When Christians ordinarily come together, is there not an unscriptural method set up, one thing here and another there, instead of leaving God's assembly in holy subjection to the Holy Ghost, and trusting Him to work freely, and fully, and mightily by the members as He will, for the good of the whole? Is not the revealed word of God, as to His assembly, like all other truth, eternal for the Church's conduct here below? I maintain that it is; and believe those who dispute its constant authority and their own present

responsibility, will have a serious question to answer before the judgment-seat of Christ; while such as stand by the will of God in His word, will surely have His blessing now and His approbation in that great day.

But to come out from what is ostensibly evil is not all. Separation from our associations ought to be a pain to us, and should never be done except as believing it to be the clear will of God. And though one ought not to refuse the weakest Christians that come from elsewhere, yet I do not think that a person ought to be quick to receive what is new to them, unless they believe that it is assuredly of God. If they only come because of some happy circumstances, it will not stand: if they say, "There is so much love, truth, union, simplicity, etc., among these Christians that we must go there," by and by some trial comes, and then they are ready to say, "There is no love at all among them — how changed they all are!" These spiritual effects may act upon the affections and win attention; but they are not an adequate ground-work for the Christian in presence of the revealed will of God. Nay, supposing you could assemble a company of happy believers, all of the same mind as to the Spirit, and the Church, and the Lord's coming, beside fundamental truth, I would not belong to it, if adhesion to their mind were a condition. It wants and ignores the divine foundation. Be it mine to cleave only to the name of the Lord Jesus, the sole and sufficient gathering-point for the entire Church of God; and this if those who gather to it are ever so few and feeble and whatever the cost. Perhaps my dearest friend may get astray or I may myself. Of course it is painful and humiliating for one to be judged by others, because of failing to judge self. But I dare not stay away because

I know the will of God is against it. We are not free to make of the Church a religious club to suit ourselves. It is God's to choose and to call as it pleases Him for the glory of His Son; it is ours to obey from our hearts. In the present broken state of Christianity we have learnt that God's principles always bind the conscience, and we have come together to be where His word is free to be carried out by the Holy Ghost. If some one amongst us falls into sin, our adversaries cry, See! they are no more perfect than their neighbours. But who ever talked of personal superiority? We arrogate nothing to ourselves, only desiring to be led of God to walk individually and collectively as He would have us do.

Are you willing to be like the people who gathered round David in the cave of Adullam? Though they were distressed and miserable when they came, they did not continue so. He who attracted them to himself was the centre of God's counsels, and God wrought in them and formed their hearts, and put honour upon them, and the day came when those despised ones became the heroes and champions of the Lord's cause when everything was broken in Israel. May it be our lot to serve Him faithfully! I believe that we are ecclesiastically where we ought to be — where the Spirit is free to open and wield and apply that truth which is calculated to separate us in heart and practice to God and His objects from the world. It is now our own fault only when we do not get on. If all that hindered us once (when bound up with the systematic dishonour of the Holy Ghost) is removed, may we feel deeply our personal failure! Our principle is no longer a human motive but divine, because it is neither more nor less than carrying out the word of God as to His Church in faith, and this as He vouchsafes light

and power. If any others could show us wherein we could do His will more perfectly, should we not greatly thank them, and bless God for the help? May we hold fast truth in subjection to His Spirit, desiring the good of all believers, let them be where they may, and not anxious to bring them out or in one moment sooner than God gives them to know His mind! I do not acknowledge that any human society, great or small, has the least right to a single child of God. It is only a question of His will. To obey His word, to urge it upon others, is neither presumptuous nor uncharitable, but faith in God. May we abound in it with thanksgiving!

Although we have already dwelt upon the more remarkable forms in which the grace of Christ has displayed itself in the way of gift — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, we have not yet touched upon the object that our Lord had in view, i.e., the general aim of ministry. This is said, in verse 12, to be “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Now you will observe, in the very first expression of the Spirit of God, that which corrects one of the most prevalent fallacies of Christendom at this moment: and not merely of Christendom in its darker forms (for I am not speaking so much of Latins or Greeks), but where there is the orthodox light of Protestantism, and even strong evangelical sentiments. No one who is acquainted with the state of feeling that is now so general will doubt but that, even among Christians, the prominent notion of ministry is the bare calling in of souls to the knowledge of their own salvation in Christ.

But this is not the Lord’s ultimate design in ministry. The winning of sinners to the Saviour is a necessary part,

but is only a part of the blessing. Evangelists, like the rest, are given “for the perfecting of the saints,” which goes much farther. It is clear that they must first become saints; but that which the Holy Ghost makes to be the proper end in view is the forming the saints according to Christ; adjusting them according to the Lord’s call and sovereign will touching them; the bringing them out adequately and rightly and freely, so as to find their proper action toward God and one another. This seems to be implied in “the perfecting of the saints.” Then we have rather the mediate forms which this end assumes, “unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ.”

God always makes of prime moment His saints individually considered — their right condition before Him, their being thoroughly fashioned recording to His standard. Their being gathered together and working as an assembly, important as it is, comes after. Thus, the subject of the body, the Church, does not appear till the close of Ephesians 1. What is the early part of that chapter filled with? That which is necessary for the perfecting of the saints. God Himself reveals His truth precisely in the same order, and to the same primary end. Here again the gifts of Christ are found to be just after the pattern of His own dealings. The perfecting of the saints is the nearest object to His heart; and then follows the means used to bring into the knowledge of common privileges, and the working of the Spirit in the assembly, which is bound up with His glory in the earth. Thus, whatever may be the condition of the Church, whatever the blessed ways of God in dealing with the Church, whatever the affections of Christ towards His body, after all God makes His saints of most immediate

account, makes their perfecting to be the first and most prominent object. And this He always holds to. Whatever the fluctuations of the work, whatever the character of His testimony at any given moment upon the earth may be, the perfecting of the saints is the unceasing object before Him.

There is something exceedingly sweet in this. Come what may, God will accomplish the perfecting of His saints, and turn even the things that are sorrowful and afflicting into a means of blessing for them, if not always to their credit. Where we need humbling, it is plain we are not humble; where we are not low in our own eyes, God must Himself make us so. The process does not give room for our importance; but God keeps His own blessed end in view, and never fails to accomplish it. So that we may always adore Him for His goodness; though it may be in that which is distressing for the time, still God never fails; He is bent upon the perfecting of the saints; He is faithful and will do it. He puts this forward before His saints as the practical object of Christ. There we have ministry taking these different forms according to His own sovereign disposition.

But the Lord has to do with ministry, directly and immediately, without the intervention of the assembly. There is no such thing in Scripture as a ministry flowing from the Church, though there is ministry directed to the Church. St. Paul speaks of himself as a minister of the Church: that is, not as derived from it, but serving it: for the Church is formed by ministry, instead of ministry flowing out of the Church. The gifts are for the perfecting of the saints. The ministry may fail, but the Lord never fails in accomplishing His end. It may be in a slower way, and there may be that which is utterly weak

and even afflicting; but He accomplishes His purposes. He gives these gifts “for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ.” These two latter clauses come in as subordinate to the first. It is most blessed to see the saints acting together; but however the work of the ministry may fail or be impaired in man’s hands, the great end to which the Lord commits Himself, and for which He has given these gifts, is carried through spite of all. And more: this is true, “till we all arrive at the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at a perfect man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” The “perfect man” here does not refer to resurrection, but to our being thoroughly grown up into the knowledge of Christ.

This is observable in St. Paul. Although his great work was unfolding the redemption of Christ and the counsels of God’s glory founded on redemption, yet he cannot but insist on this full growth of the saints in connection with the deepening knowledge of the Son of God. It is the person of Christ that rises up before the soul; and this is very much more a test of spirituality than any acquaintance with His work. It is with Himself, as a divine person, that we become more and more intimate through the truth that God ministers to our souls. This is what is put before us — “Till we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at a perfect man.” Knowledge of the past ways of God would not do now. The Old Testament saints did look to the Messiah in the way of hope; but the present form in which the Spirit of God presents the object to us is the knowledge of His person, as the Son fully revealed for our joy and praise and worship. So that we have here

the great christian object and form of knowledge that God has in view with all His saints now. The comparison with verse 14 gives the force of the expression, “a perfect man;” it is in contrast with being children, “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more babes, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” What God designs for us is that we should be full-grown, and this “unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” It is in contrast with this condition of weakness and exposure to all the craft of men, and their changing, scheming tactics of error.

Then we have the opposite practical way in which our growth is carried on. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, who is the head, even Christ.” The expression seems deeper than what we have here. It is “being truthful in love,” not merely “speaking the truth in love,” though, of course, this is a very important part of being truthful, but it is not everything; and we all know that it is very possible not to be truthful in thought and feeling, where the words are quite correct. “Being truthful in love” implies truth in the inward parts.

We find here the two essential features of godliness which were found in Christ in infinite perfection. He was the light. Whatever He might say, He exactly reflected the full truth from God Himself; nay, He was it. We find a remarkable expression when our Lord was dealing with the Jews and bringing Himself out as the light of the world, in John 8. They asked Him what He was, and He says (according to the English version), “Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.” But the true

meaning is," Absolutely what I speak unto you." There should be neither "at the beginning," but "absolutely;" nor "what I said," but "what I am speaking." If these words are weighed, you will find the force of them. Our Lord is exactly and absolutely what He utters; His words convey with infallible certainty what He is. He certainly was truthful in love. Our Lord's words so completely gave out the inner man, He was so perfectly transparent, that not one thing in Him deflected from the truth; nothing seemed to be but exactly what He was. And this because there was no sin in Him neither was guile found in His mouth. There was no object but God before His soul, as He says Himself: "I do always those things that please Him." And you may rely upon it, that it is having Christ before us as the object of our souls in everything practically, which alone gives us power of truth. The moment we have anything of our own as an object, so far we slip aside, and that comes out which is not the full truth, for Christ alone is the truth, and He alone gives us the truth in perfect love; and it is only in proportion as we are filled with Him, and have Him to the exclusion of all our own evil, that we ourselves walk in the truth. Let us have our hearts fixed on any one thing or person save Christ, evil slips out, and it is good for us to know and own this. It was never so with our Lord. He could say, "I have set the Lord always before me." And He has given us Himself always to set before us.

Our Lord's meat and His drink was to do the will of His Father; still, of course, He had to meet God about our sins in a manner that none is called upon to do. We start upon a redemption accomplished by Christ, which has brought us into the presence of God, and which calls

upon us to walk according to the grace which has brought us there and which keeps us there. We may not all realize it, but we have done with ourselves by virtue of the work of Christ; we are brought near to God, brought to be at home with God, and from that place we are called upon to take up everything that becomes us here below; and here we have to judge what is the will of God, for we are palpable weakness if we are not doing His will distinctly. It is not only that God will have us conformed to Christ by and by, but this is what He has in view now. And in spite of all, wherever the heart is true and Christ is before the soul, though there may be immense differences, yet this is God's delight with His children. The child does not remain always a child, but becomes a man: and so should it be with the family of God. He would have us all to grow.

This, then, is the object in the gifts of Christ. He is bent upon blessing souls even now in the world, and such is the object of all ministry. It is not something left for our thoughts and arrangements, but it is all in the hands of the Lord. It is He who loves His saints, who will bless them, and who makes His individual servants, that have to do with the saints, to be immediately connected with Himself, and to have His objects before their eyes in a duty which they have to discharge to Him and not to them. For directly the Church becomes the great object before the soul, the blessing is of a lower character altogether, inferior in all its spiritual lineaments. There may be right feelings toward one another, but there is that which is much higher than loving one's brethren, divine though it be; and if you know nothing above brotherly love as the object, you will fail to walk in love. God is higher than love, and this is precisely the point of

difference so much needed for the moment. One of the main things that we have to guard against is Satan's endeavouring to persuade people that, because God is love, therefore love is God. But it is not so. If I say that God is love, I bring out what He is in the active energy of His holy nature. But this is not all that God is. He is light as much as He is love; and I should own His love without the denial of His light. What prevails among many now is the deifying of love in order to strip God of His light. But where we have it clearly before us, not that love "is God," but that "God is love," love will not be the less, but in fact more true and pure. While it will be the active spring of our own hearts, it will not be found at issue with His character, but will leave room for God to display Himself according to all that He is. God is truthful in love. Take it in the case of His dealings with my soul, for instance, in conversion. Is faith the only thing produced by the Holy Ghost? What is the first effect of His breaking in upon a sinner? Making nothing of him. Is not this love? Yes; but it is God's love that deals with me in the truth of what He is, and of what the sinner's awful condition is. So the effect produced on the heart of him that is renewed is not merely faith in Christ, but repentance toward God; it is the judgment of his whole moral condition in His sight. And as you find both connected in God's dealings with a soul from the first, and in the moral answer produced in the soul of the saint, so it is true all through. Where the action of a saint is healthful in the presence of God, the room will surely not be less open for divine love, yet there will be the maintenance of the holiness and majesty of God. We should not wish to be spared pain for the purpose of slipping through at God's expense. There never has been one trial of heart gone through with God, but we have

been blessed by it. We might have the blessing in a still fuller way without so much failure or letting out of what we are. But supposing we do not so lay hold of Christ as to be lifted above ourselves, then we must learn painfully what we are. Yet God turns it all for blessing. This is the great thought of the chapter. He has brought us into a blessed place. First of all, we are in Christ before God; and next, God dwells in us: the one is our great privilege, the other is also our solemn responsibility, which flows from the fact that God has made us His dwelling-place.

At once all contracted ecclesiastical notions are shut out by the truth of His dwelling-place. If we merely meet as a church, such a connection with God disappears. But if it were only two or three, I must meet on the ground of the Church or it has no truth in it before God; and two or three Christians thus gathered would do God's will and would have Him dwelling in them. There Christ is, and there God dwells in a special way. God can bless where He does not sanction; He can bless even in Popery. His grace is so rich and free, and above all the wicked ways of men, that He can use the name of Christ in the most untoward circumstances; but this is very different from God's putting His seal to what we are about. In order that He may Himself be associated in it, we must be in the truth of things, and acting according to the divine mind. I believe that only in our own days, since the time when the apostles, Paul especially, were raised up, has this great truth been brought out by the Holy Ghost so as to bear upon souls according to God. I am not aware of any adequate testimony to it since the ruin of Christendom. There were in abundance efforts of men to improve the present and imitate the past; but

either is a very different thing from God's provision in the word for saints in a fallen state. If you see a man who is striving simply and ever so earnestly to get better, you say justly that he is under law and does sot understand the gospel. Just so, when a number of Christians are trying to ameliorate Christendom by new plans and efforts, I should say that, if they understood the nature of the Church of God, and the Holy Ghost's relation to it, they would feel that mere union is a poor substitute for unity; they would humble themselves in the sight of God because of the state of the Church, and would fall back upon the word of God to see whether there is not a real and lowly but divine direction for the actual state of things in Christendom. May God deliver His saints from the unholy as well as unbelieving but very general notion, that we are obliged on account of present circumstances to go on in sin! To men of spiritual discernment the thought is just making God such an one as ourselves. If I give up His holiness in one thing, how can I stand up for it or trust Him in another? Contrariwise, let us maintain that there is no emergency as to which God can lower His holiness, or sanction the lack of it in us; and if His will be perfect in other things, is it less in that which so deeply and nearly concerns the glory and name of Christ as the Church? People argue from the fact that things are not in order and beauty now; they go so far as to deny the responsibility of saints, as if Christians were not in one way or another connected with these public departures from God. Will it be urged that they are to be adhered to because they themselves or their fathers have been brought up in them? Surely the one question for us is this: Do we desire to learn and do the will of God? Is this our governing object? Or is it merely, Where can I get

enough comfort or blessing to keep my head above water? Of this, too, I am fully assured, that if you are found doing the will of God, you will have the most and best blessing; but it is not the true christian motive, and it is an unsafe guide. We may go here and get a little blessing, and then go there hoping to get a little more. But, as it is said here, growth is, “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” He would guard us from all the cunning craftiness of men whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Is there, then, no means of having certainty in the midst of the confusion that reigns? Assuredly there is, and where the soul is sufficiently broken down to feel what is due to God, He will make all plain. We never ought to join in a single thing that we know to be wrong, whether privately or publicly. Of course, there may be everywhere things done or said that one may not be able to approve of, but this individual failure is different from joining in public acts of worship, the order of which is known beforehand to be systematically unscriptural. There I am identified with the guilt of what is done contrary to the word of God and so fixed by human authority. But this shows us the importance of nothing being done in the assembly but what will carry the weight of the whole assembly along with it. Hence, too, the evident desirableness of keeping out of the assembly all debatable questions. We may speak of them to a servant of God, to a wise brother; but even that which I may individually enjoy is not a thing that I am entitled to occupy the assembly of God with, unless I believe God would have me say it, especially when there may be room for a just doubt on the mind of the simplest

believer there. Minor matters of discipline never ought to be brought into the assembly. When anything appears of fundamental false doctrine or of a grossly immoral character, let it be what it may, there it is plain that all saints must be assumed to have the very same judgment. All would feel that they could have no fellowship with blasphemy or drunkenness, or any fatal manifestation of evil of one kind or another. Then we have cases which claim the united judgment of the whole assembly. Supposing a saint were what is called a Churchman, or a Dissenter, and little versed in scriptural thought or action ecclesiastically, still, if he were really born of God, there could be no material difference of judgment about such matters. The power of the Spirit is mighty; the Lord knows how to work; and the common spiritual instincts of all the children of God, guided by His word as to such matters, find their expression in the renouncing and judgment of all such evil. But public discipline in the Church is so serious a matter, that it ought never to be resorted to till the evil rises up to such a height that all unbiassed believers would be united about it. There is a tendency among righteous and active minds to make, out of every matter of difference, questions for the Church to decide on and deal with. This is a grave mistake, fraught with ill for all concerned, and to be resisted with all possible earnestness. Even saints are apt to be prejudiced or prepossessed in what concerns one another especially in small things which can at all admit of party feeling. Besides, it would become an instrument of torture for many souls, if every private matter were liable to be brought into public. Thanks be to God, He has made His own landmarks for our guidance, and has shown us clearly that to bring anything into the open arena of

Church discipline, ought never to be till every means has been taken to hinder it. The desire of our hearts ought to be the glory of the Lord in the blessing of one another's souls; and we all know that needless publicity must add largely to shame, pain, and difficulty. But when it is needful, let it be done, so that it be to the Lord, with the utmost gravity and real love. The destroying the true notion of the Church, and of its action, has tended to reduce it to the level of a mere club, sometimes lower than the world, though with the highest pretensions.

But when we lay hold of the truth that the Lord has that on earth with which He links His name, although only two or three souls may have gathered unto that name, renouncing their connection with what is of the world and of man; when we have come to learn from God that He who saved our souls is the only One competent to form and keep and guide the Church, when we know that He has made us members of His own Church, all we have to do is to act upon the ground of the Church that God has made. If we now belong to God at all, we belong to His assembly, and we are called to follow it out practically. If I know ever so few that act upon the word of God which applies to this, I am free, yea, bound in the liberty of Christ to meet with them. Of course, it would be matter of thankfulness, if there were hundreds of thousands meeting thus, though this might in other ways entail more sorrow and trial; but the trial will not be mere trouble of flesh; it will be, if we walk with God, the exercise of grace and patience; it will call out the real love to Christ that seeks the good of others, and this is always drawn out into intercession by the pressure of evil on all sides.

Supposing, then, two or three come to the point that they cannot acknowledge a human church, any more than a human salvation; are they to sit still, dishonouring God and ruining their conscience by persisting in known evil; or are they not in faith to meet in the Lord's name? By all means let them come together, following the word and trusting the Spirit of God. They will find trial, but true liberty and the Holy Ghost working in their midst. He is given to abide with them for ever; let them believe it and not fail to count upon it. They may be very weak, but the Holy Ghost is not weak. On coming together, perhaps there is no one to speak at length, with profit, to them; but the assembly of God does not come together for sermons. Much or little speaking, their object is to do the will of God, to remember Christ, to act scripturally on the faith of God's aim and glory in His Church. If there were twenty thousand Christians round about, but meeting on human principles, what believer can maintain that these two or three would not enjoy the special presence of God among them in a way the others could not? The more we have the sense of the ruin of the Church, the fuller our confidence that God's principles always remain intact and as obligatory now as on the day of Pentecost; the more happy the soul in the Lord, the more it will be drawn out in love to all saints. May it be ours thus by grace to "grow up unto him in all things, who is the head, even Christ!" This does not depend on the number of communicants, nor on the forms and means of ministerial power, but far more on our own souls being with God, and doing His will, not only in individual service and life, but also as His assembly, which ought to come together according to His word.

There are, then, these three things: first and prominently, the perfecting of the saints individually; subordinately, next, the work of the ministry, where other persons act upon me; and, lastly, the building up of the body of Christ. The full aim and desired result of it all is the growing up unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, who is the head, even Christ.” Allow me to point out a practical proof of it. You are aware that at an early date, false doctrines and heresies of all kinds came in. What was the resource of good men in those days? They invented creeds and confessions by which they endeavoured to try suspected persons. But where was the authority for this course? Or was it found that these bulwarks kept the evil out? In no wise, time, or place. There is only one power of maintaining truth and love — even Christ; and where Christ is really held up and to, without the devices of men, there may be weakness and ignorance at first, but the result will be that Christ’s strength will be made perfect in their weakness. The power of Christ will rest upon those who, feeling their own weakness, cleave to Him alone. On the other hand, while you often stumble weak consciences in good men by imposing creeds, you can rarely, if ever, thereby shut out bad men; nor would spiritual men, alive to the honour of God’s word, and aroused to see their unwarranted character if ever so correct, deem it right to own them. Thus you hamper the weak and you exclude the strong among the children of God; you have a crowd of thoughtless or bigoted subscribers; and, as to

dangerous men, what thief or robber cannot leap over a creed? Human restraints may clog and dishonour the work of God, but they avail not to hinder the evil of man or Satan. What you find in Scripture is the saints led on and the body knit together by the different joints and bands and thus having nourishment ministered. This is the exercise and fruit of ministry exercised in all its extent; for there may be the Spirit of God giving a word by one who has not a permanent gift, though God ordinarily makes a man an evangelist or a teacher; so that a stated ministry is a truth of God, while the truth goes much farther.

But exclusive ministry, I am bold to say, is an interference with the rights of Christ and with the action of the Holy Ghost. God has caused to be felt in these last days the ruin of the Church more than at any epoch known to me in its past history; but He has also made souls learn and feel that no ruin of the Church destroys a divine principle. What was the truth for the Church is the truth for him who believes. The original principle of ministry ever abides the only principle which He sanctions or we ought to follow. If there was nothing like modern practice in apostolic times, it is a human thing (and why should a saint hold to or justify it?) in our days. It is absolutely due to the Lord, that the Church should not interfere with those who are scripturally doing His work;2 and also, that all should leave room for Him to raise up others as He pleases. No workman, skilled or blessed as he may be, has all gifts in his person. There might be some member of Christ in the congregation qualified of God to edify by a word of wisdom occasionally, or able to preach the gospel, to exhort, or to minister in some mode or measure, according to the

word of God. What we find in Scripture is the door kept open in principle and practice for all that God gives. Surely this is not to disparage ministry; it is, on the contrary, to assert it, and the rights of the Lord in it. But the ground on which ministry is exercised at the present time, is so wholly, certainly, and transparently human, that the effect is inevitably to accredit a number of persons as ministers who are not even Christians, and to discredit all real ministers, who, for the Lord's sake, refuse unscriptural forms, old or new. This is an evil that no godly man, who desires to be obedient, ought to tolerate, or even make light of, for an instant. It seems to me a good reason why it is wrong to become a minister of any denomination that follows (as all do) these baseless traditions. If you are a minister at all, you are a minister of Christ and of nobody else. This the word of God makes as plain as light. The action of the assembly, as such, is entirely distinct. While the minister is, of course, a part or member of the assembly, yet must he act, if he act rightly, from Christ, and from Christ alone. He may strive to edify believers by discourses, exhortations, etc., addressed to them; he may seek earnestly the conversion of unbelievers; but ministry or no ministry (in which last case there would, of course, be loss), yet the assembly goes on, competent and bound to perform its own functions in subjection to the Lord. Again, not ministry but the presence and operation of the Spirit constitute the power of the assembly. This is as important for the assembly to bear in mind, as it is for the servants to remember that they have immediately to do with Christ as their Lord. Of course, abuse of ministry, like any other sin, necessarily brings him who is guilty under the judgment of the assembly. No man can ever be beyond the Church's judgment, where he

gives occasion for it by the allowance of evil in his conduct. But the Church's interference never ought to appear, save in the case of known evil doctrine or practice.

This may help to show the practical bearing of the passage. What God does and Christ gives, the mutual service of the various members of the body, joints and bands, — all is that we should "grow up unto Christ in all things; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." There we have the theory of the Church, because God, in laying down these blessed principles, does not bring in the mere accidents of evil. There is no such thought as a screw being loose here or something else being wrong there. All is supposed to be moving on harmoniously for the great end for which the Lord has established it. Disciplinary action, resources where evil reigns, must be looked for and are provided elsewhere.

There is a difficulty that people often bring forward — that you cannot have a perfect church on earth. What do they mean? If it be a condition where there will not be a soul ever doing or saying anything but what is quite according to God, they are asserting, doubtless, a simple truism, if it be not rather mere foolishness. But what is insinuated is, that you cannot on earth get any association of saints according to the will of God. I deny this, believing that you may readily find the path of His will, and that every believer ought to find that path. You are responsible to learn the will of God about His Church, if you are a member of it, and to be doing

nothing else. If I know two or three Christians in a place, seeking to walk according to the Scriptures, there should be my lot. One may be a forward man naturally, another might have strange notions and ways. There might be something faulty in each of the individuals. All this is not to deter me for an instant, because my owning them as being that part of the Church which is acting where they are according to God does not depend upon an immaculate ideal in this or that. The question is — are they doing the will of God according to His word? God's will at least is perfect, and he who does it abides for ever. Is not His will about His Church as absolute as about anything else? If this be allowed, there, I say, is the ground of action. Must we not be about our Father's business as to this? Hence the one question for all who desire to please God is, what is His will? Not surely to meet as the flock of Mr. So-and-so, (for where do we read anything of the sort in Scripture) but to meet as Christians who are simply cleaving to Christ, and counting on the Holy Ghost to teach all the will of God? Is not this, and this alone, the true basis on which Christians should corporately act? Where, then, shall I find believers so meeting? Are there any who have had the faith to come out of that which is merely human, so as to stand on the ground laid down in God's word? The same Scripture that tells me how I am to be saved tells me how to walk in His house, the Church of God. Neither the assembly nor ministry is left to human wit or caprice; as to both, we must search, and be subject to, the word of God. God's system (for He has one, as revealed in Scripture) is what we have to learn and act upon; and though we may encounter great trial and difficulty, and find ourselves in the same straits the early saints experienced, yet, even this confirms the truth to

us. Surely we shall have joy and strength if simply dependent on and obedient to the Lord. The very trials will become a means of fresh blessing; and we shall prove how truly God can give us to use for His own glory much of His word which was once practically useless to us, and which we supposed merely referred to apostolic times. We thus begin to find a present application of the word of God in our corporate position, just as much as in meeting the wants of our souls day by day. If this be so. may we have the happiness, not only of knowing these things but of doing them steadfastly unto the end!

The reader now enters upon the general walk of christian men, as suitable to, and connected with, the doctrine of our epistle. Indeed there was already an exhortation in the beginning of Ephesians 4, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. But the apostle here descends to particulars. And, first of all, there is a solemn injunction to the saints, that they should not henceforth walk as the other Gentiles walked, in the vanity of their mind. The Spirit of God guards us against what we perhaps might think needless — the walk of those who surround us — the walk that was our own before we were brought to Christ. And yet, the moment that we reflect, the wisdom of such an exhortation is apparent; for Christians are ordinarily liable to be much influenced by the tone of thought and feeling-current in the world outside. The ruling passion that carries the world on for the time being is always apt to be a snare to those, at least, who shrink from the cross day by day, and so much the more because they do not suspect themselves. Whatever be that which occupies its energies, especially if philanthropy, moral progress, or religion be the form that it takes, there is

always a liability to be thrown off our guard. Besides, and this is the immediate point here, old habit is strong; so that the apostle does not hesitate to warn these saints who stood out, not only in the fresh joy of faith, but also in outward position, very separate from the world (and the lines were at that time strongly defined); and yet, in this opening word of exhortation, the Holy Ghost very solemnly guards the saints against being drawn into the ways and practices of the Gentiles. There is often a danger of this with Christians, because they do not like to be singular. There may be peculiar people among the children of God. Of course, the apostle does not speak of eccentric individuals, to whom it would be no difficulty but a pleasure to differ from everybody else — men who affect originality in word and deed, and in their strain after it are only odd. But he is guarding against the common moral danger, when faith has lost somewhat of its simplicity and freshness.

On the other hand, the apostle has shown elsewhere — and we should always endeavour to remember it — that it is a wise and important thing to meet souls in grace as far as possible, not to impose upon others what they have not strength to bear. In writing to the Corinthians the apostle had insisted on this, as his ministry exemplified it. He had become a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews. He was made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. There was no kind of pressing points. There was the hearty desire for the good of souls; for we may have this without the pressure of our own particular thoughts and feelings, however right they may be. It is the elasticity of the Christian if established in grace. We rarely can pull the cord too tightly in dealing with our own souls, or be too

stringent in our vigilance and prayer against slipping here and there. But it is a totally different thing in having to do with others. We have to bear their infirmities, if, in truth, we are strong; it is for their good that the Lord lays them upon our hearts. We find that, even with His own disciples, He went not beyond what they were able at that time to bear. But the very desire to meet souls, and not to raise questions that would gender strife, might expose a gracious Christian to be taking the colour of those outside himself, and giving up his own principles. On every side he has to watch.

There is no doubt, then, of the forbearance in which we are called to walk with one another; nevertheless, we need to beware of turning grace into levity or licentiousness. “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” (Ver. 17, 18.) Here he begins with the inner thing. You will find that our tendency is to occupy ourselves and others with something outward. But the apostle goes to the root of the evil walk of the Gentiles. Their minds were vain and empty, as all must be who have not God distinctly and positively and intelligently before them in any matter, whatever it may be. As to these Gentiles, in nothing had they God before them; they were “without God in the world.” Consequently, there was nothing but the empty vapouring mind and mouth of man, imagining one thing and expressing another. What was the effect? The understanding was darkened. “They were alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them, because of the

blindness of their heart." These are various descriptions, not of the outward walk, but of the root of all the evil fruit they bore. God was not in all their thoughts. They were "alienated from the life of God." How indeed could it be otherwise? The life of God is only found in His Son; and Him, and, consequently, it they had not. Far from having relish, or a just sense of need, they were estranged from good; and this on account of the blindness or hardness of their hearts. Thus far is the evident tracing of what the evil walk of these Gentiles sprang from; the sum and substance is that it arose from their ignorance. And their ignorance was because their hearts were hard, not from mental dullness. What a solemn and practical truth for every soul of man, converted or not! Our conduct flows from our judgment, and our judgment from our affections. Thus, the state of our heart becomes most important in practice. We find here that all the outward man finds its source in the inner man, and the inner man is formed by that which governs the heart.

Hence the all-importance of having Christ for the heart's object — yea, exclusive object. For nothing is more common than to have divided affections. Indeed, it is the great thing against which we all have to watch. Had we an eye more single, and a heart more thoroughly and self-judgingly devoted to Christ, what would be the consequence? The heart always gives direction, colour, and energy to the judgment. There never would be a waver individually, and there would be nothing but peaceful walking together in the light of God, without slip or stumble of any kind. And this is the theory of a Christian. (Compare Phil. 1 and Col. 1) Practically there are difficulties. Who of us has not had to confess

grievous failure and sin? Who has not had to say, I do not know what the mind of God is as to this or that? In a word, the understanding has been too often darkened, and the walk unlike His whose we are. Of course they differ from what we have described here. But is it not a solemn thing that the Christian has to watch against the very same evil which, in souls that know Him not, denies and outrages the character and will of God? And yet this is what we all have to feel and confess as to ourselves. How often we have been without divine light! This ought never to be in a saint. It never was so with Christ. He was the light; so that it would utterly fall short of His glory to say that He was always not only walking in the light, but according to the light. Consequently He never knew what it was to have a shade of doubt. If He waited, it was never doubt but simple dependence on His Father's will, as in John 11. It may be our path to wait; and it is well to do so, when we have no such assurance. The development that follows is a description of the awful depravity of the Gentiles; as he says in the next verse, "Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." No doubt it is the lowest moral degradation of which the life of man is capable. But the wholesome thing for us to see, and to apply for our own souls' help and guidance and guard too, is that all the excesses of this outward evil were the result of the heart being darkened, and this because it was without the life of God. There was nothing but what Satan drew from a man's own mind, and the consequence was the falsifying of his judgments and feelings. Hence men became a prey to every kind of evil. They had given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But now comes the Christian in contrast. He says (although we are in danger of all this, and the very sense of our danger is what God uses to keep us from falling into the danger), “Ye have not so learned Christ.” As all the practical evil of the Gentiles arose from their ignorance of God, the heart, the mind, the walk, all wrong, and increasingly evil; so now God’s deliverance from all evil, root, branch, and fruit, is Christ. And what a blessed, simple, holy, God-glorifying deliverance it is! It is not that He enters into anything of the various processes He may use in leading to this result. Besides, Christ is the way, as well as the truth. The one grand means that applies to every case, and that gives the surest deliverance, is Christ Himself. “Ye have not so learned Christ.” He purposely makes Him to be the person who has to do directly with the soul. It is a remarkable way of connecting us with our Lord, though common in John, “My sheep hear my voice.” But here, though the union of the members with the Head and not life only is the point insisted upon, we approach closely to the teaching of “the elder.” It is as if we listened to Christ ourselves. “If so be that ye have heard him” — not about Him; they were taught in Him also, “as the truth is in Jesus.” Is there not great emphasis in this expression? It is not as the truth is in Christ. We all know that Jesus is Christ, and Christ is Jesus. But God never uses one word in vain. And I think that the difference is the greater because both are used. He first of all puts the word Christ — “Ye have not so learned Christ;” because there he brings the whole mass of my privilege before the soul. Christ is the special name, when I look at Him as the risen, exalted man. In Him I have got my blessing. The word conveys to my mind the thought of One in whom all is concentrated as dead, crucified, but now in

heaven. Jesus is the personal name that He bears on earth. The Spirit had been revealing in previous chapters the great name brought before us in Christ. But when He is about to speak of the practical knowledge which would apply to the duties of their walk here below, He says, “If so be ye have heard him, and been taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.” There, I apprehend, He is more speaking of Him as that person who, in the eyes of men, as well as before God, was the blessed example of all light and purity in His ways here below. Thus, I conceive, any spiritual mind will at once appreciate what a blessed way it is of bringing this before our souls. He places before us the living presentation of all we have in Him; but we see it in the ways of that blessed Man, Jesus, here below. By the “truth that is in Jesus,” does He not mean the truth that we see and hear and know carried out in every word He said, in all His ways and obedience and service, in every kind of suffering that He passed through on the earth, in His patience, in His earnestness, in His zeal for the glory of God, in His tender care for those that belonged to God, and in His compassion for perishing sinners? And yet, look where you will, behold His intolerance of that which is contrary to God. All these, and infinitely more, we find in Jesus, and no where else, in perfection.

It is only in the person of Jesus that we have all truth fully out. I may learn truth through the Holy Ghost, and He is the only power of my knowing the truth, and is therefore, I suppose, called “truth” in 1 John 5:6. Neither God, as such, nor the Father, is ever called the truth; nor could it be. When you speak of the truth, you do not mean merely either the divine nature in its perfectness, or His person “from whom cometh down

every good gift.” But why is it that Jesus should be emphatically the truth? Jesus is the One who objectively has presented to me that which shows me the bearing and relationship of everything to God as well as to man. If I want to test any one thing, I never can arrive at its full character till I view it in connection with the person of Christ. The Holy Ghost is the truth subjectively, because no man can behold Jesus or find the truth in Jesus without Himself. The Holy Ghost is the revealer of Jesus; our own mind cannot see Him. Even the new man cannot of itself understand Jesus, or enter into the things of God. And you will observe how strikingly this was shown when the disciples themselves, already born of God, had to wait till the Lord opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures, and after that for power to act on them. After they were converted, they needed the power of the Spirit to enable them to apprehend the Scriptures. Besides, again they must wait for power to testify the truth from the Scriptures to others. They required to have the power of the Spirit, distinct from the new nature, for the purpose of entering into the things of God. Mere human nature never understands the things of God, the new man does. But in order to do it, the Spirit’s leading is requisite. The new man is characterized by dependence. The Holy Ghost acts in His own power. So that we do not merely need dependence upon God but power from Him in order to enter into the truth. I am not now speaking of being converted merely, but of the practical entering into the mind of Christ, and the ways of God as brought out in the ways of Jesus.

Let me illustrate the value of the truth as it is in Jesus. Take any truth you like, as, e.g., man. Where shall I

learn the truth about man? Shall I look for it in Adam — a man that listened to his wife after she had listened to the devil — a man who, when God came down, ran away from Him, and even dared to insult God by laying the blame upon Him? Shall I look at his sons — at Cain, his firstborn, or at Abel, whom Cain slew? The beautiful grace in Abel was what was of God, not what was of himself. If you pursue the history of man as such, you only find evil and pride and presumption increasing upon him, till you give up the whole tale in shame and disgust. And so it would all end, but for the Second Adam. I find here in every step that He took, in every word that He said, in everything that flowed from His heart and was reflected in His ways, One that never did His own will. Now I learn the beauty and the wonder of a man subject to God upon the earth — the only One who ever walked in perfect, moral dignity, though He was despised of all, and most of all hated by the religious leaders of the world in that day. But how did not God delight in Him? Here, then, the humbling truth is told. Man has shown himself thoroughly out: Jesus, the cross, tells the tale in full.

But supposing another instance: if I look up and think of God, where shall I, of a surety, find Him? In creation? It is all ruined. Besides, to read Him only in the book of nature, is but to have glimpses of power and beneficence, But in the midst of all these large and shining characters of divine majesty, and wisdom, and goodness, scattered up and down through everything that He has made upon the earth, I should also have to face other characteristics, as of weakness, decay, suffering, death, etc. The question arises, whence do these come? They are as crooked as the others were

straight; the latter as full of misery as the former were the impress of wisdom and power. The result of all is, that, for the mere reasoner in the vanity of man's mind, the understanding gets darkened; and all that can thus be learned, even from the consideration of that which comes from the hand of God, completely fails to give the knowledge of Himself. I see the effects of another hand there as well as His own — the hand of a destroyer and liar; and instead of rising up from nature to nature's God, as poets vainly sing, you are apt to sink from nature to the devil who has ruined it all; you fall into the snares of the enemy by the effort to find out God in your own strength. I want some other way wherein to learn what God is. To gather an evidence of His being is one thing; to know Him is another. I can delight in anything that He has made, but what are His thoughts, feelings, ways, especially to a sinner? If you talk about providence, is there not an Abel suffering and a Cain prosperous? Great deeds were done in the family of the proud murderer; while those who had whatever then shone of the light of God, were disliked and scorned by the world; often weak in their own eyes too, but suffering and cast out wherever faith made them odious to those who had it not. This is an impenetrable enigma to man. How can he, in the face of such facts, discern the superintending power of a God as conscience tells there is? Constant difficulties arise; and the reason is very plain; — it is not in circumstances around, any more than in my own mind, that I can find the truth. Not that there are not traces and indications in providence as in creation; but I want the truth and cannot find it in either.

Then I may come down to the law. Does it give me the truth? In no way. It is not that the law was not good and holy, but it is never called, nor in itself could it be, the truth. Its design was more for making the discovery of man than of God. Its operation was that man might thereby learn what he is himself. It runs like a ploughshare, when directed by the Spirit, into the heart, and lays bare many furrows, and discovers what man never knew was there before. But none of these things shows what God is to man in grace. Not even the law can give the truth as to this. I cannot at all learn by it what a Saviour-God is, nor even fully what man is. At the best it declares what a man ought to be as well as do; but this is not the truth. What I ought to be is not God's truth but my duty. Law was the standard for man in the flesh; and hence it never was given till man was a sinful man. "The law was given by Moses," and not to or by Adam. The commandment laid upon Adam is never called the law, although it was, of course, a law.

Further, you will never find truth, even in the Bible, if you sever it from Jesus. But the moment the same blessed One, who has shown me in His own life and death what man is, has also shown me in the very same what God is, then all the clouds break and the difficulties vanish. Now I know God, beholding Him in Jesus. New thoughts of God dawn on the soul, and submitting to Him, I am made perfectly happy; perhaps not all at once, but as surely as my soul has received Jesus, and learnt what the true God is in Jesus, I have eternal life, and shall find unbroken peace; but in Him I receive all that I want, all that God intends for my soul, because the truth is in Jesus. Thus, then, as a believer, I know God; I know that which the heathen never did nor

could reach. Their understanding was darkened. Having no knowledge of Jesus, they had no full or saving means of knowing God. But this is precisely what the gospel brings close to every poor, needy soul who hears it now. And what is it then that I learn of God, when I look at the truth as it is in Jesus? I learn first this — a God that comes down to me, a God that seeks my soul to do me good, a God that can follow me with love, selfish as I am, and pity my ignorance, and not this only, but One that can instruct me, and is willing to do it, spite of my wilfulness and stupidity; in short, a most gracious and faithful God He makes Himself known in Jesus. I find One who, after using other means, spent Himself in love upon me, that I might know Him; One who undertook to bear the judgment of my sins. For Jesus came and took all sins upon Himself for every soul that believes upon Him. I learn now that even the hateful self which has so refused and slighted Him — for this He has suffered, and completely deals with it. It has been judged in the cross of Christ; and if my soul believes that God is good enough to do all this for me, to suffer all this for me, to take and bear the whole consequence upon Himself in the person of His beloved Son; if I see this and bow to it, and receive it from God, what can shake or harass my soul more? My sins? Certainly if anything ought to trouble my soul, they most of all. But what is the cross for? What has God done there? What has He told me in the gospel? If it was God revealing Himself in His beloved Son, if it was Jesus the Son of God that was made sin there, why should I have a single doubt or anxiety upon that score? All depends upon this: Have I bowed to what God has wrought and given me in the cross of Christ? If I am despairing about sin, it is in effect making the cross of Christ of none effect, and the

work of Christ a vain thing. He has perfectly done His task, and I am entitled so to rest upon it, as to know that my sins never can come up against me more. Ought I not to be a happy man, and to rest in the most perfect peace because of what Jesus had done and suffered? Here faith can repose. Christ's death has such value in the mind of God, that He loves to give this peace in consequence. Such is the truth as it is in Jesus. What a wonderful depth and breadth of truth there is, if you look at it thus! What a poor thing my own experience is, compared with the truth as it is in Jesus! Spiritual power is much more proved by discerning Jesus in others, than by measuring or comparing what people are in themselves, which, indeed, is far from wise. But yet what a disappointing thing it is to see Him merely as He is reflected in others! I must look at the truth as it is in Jesus: in what He was here below, as One who has shown me all through His life and up to His death what God is and man too, Himself the model-man.

In the same person of Jesus I alone see the full truth about anything at all. And you will find the value of this not merely in the great lessons of what God or man is, but if you have to do with any particular trial or difficulty, what is the one test of anything right or wrong? The truth as it is in Jesus. It is the power of using Jesus to meet that difficulty, and of seeing how His name bears upon it. He has expressed His will about it — where I am to be quiet, where I am to act, how I am to walk, and how to bear. He has given me an example that I should follow in His steps. The secret of the power of being like Jesus depends upon the measure of spirituality we have in applying His name. I am still assuming that there is honesty of purpose, and that we

are desiring to walk before one another as we are walking in truth before God ourselves. It is in proportion as we turn to Jesus and use Him, and view things in Him; this is the rule and spring of real spiritual power. It is this which constitutes strength and maturity in Christ. It was not the amount of zeal or of overcoming the world, or any great knowledge of this thing or that, but it is found in knowing Him. “I have written unto you fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning.” Who is this? Jesus. The knowledge of Jesus, then, is the practical power, growth, and wisdom of the Christian; it is, as well as shows, advance in the things of God. This is in truth what all have to learn, more or less. But to know it deeply, and so as to apply it and bring it out, was what specially characterized the fathers. Everybody talks in his own tongue. The dullest soul can use intelligibly the words of his vernacular language. But there is an immense difference between the capacity of different persons in wielding their own tongue. It is not every one who can speak according to what the subject calls for. A man who has a mastery of the language proves it by applying it appropriately to all variety of subjects. So all saints must have laid hold more or less of the truth in Jesus, but then the power to know it well, to use it rightly, to bring it out on fitting occasions and turn it to profit for ourselves and others — this is the true secret of our progress in the things of God, and what tends to the blessing of souls and the helping on of the cause of God. The importance of such growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus cannot be over estimated.

Then we have stated to us the practical object of it all — “That ye put off according to the former conversation

the old man, which is corrupt according to the lusts of deceit." It is not a question of improvement. There is no bettering our old man. The heart may be purified by faith, but in itself it is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Faith may work the new life, and the Spirit; but the flesh never can be changed or renewed. And here we find what is to be done with our odd nature: "That ye put off," etc.3 The apostle is speaking to Christians. They have the old man, and need practically to put it off. We must beware, remembering that we have still this incurably evil thing, accustomed to indulge its bad ways before conversion, and still tending to drag one, if unwatchful, into evil.

But now begins the positive part. There was, first, the putting off the old man, the moral judgment of it, grounded on God's judgment in the cross of Christ, where it was definitively done with. Then comes the renewing of the spirit of the mind, which we cannot have unless there is the judgment of the old. The renewal is intimated to be a present process going on gradually, as the spirit of the mind is imbued with Christ. The putting off and putting on are not viewed as present, but as the act in itself once for all. "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; that ye put on the new man which, according to God, has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth." They had the new man of course; but it is the putting on the new man practically, the outward manifestation of the new man that was already within them. It is well to bear in mind that this is "righteousness and holiness of truth." It is the truth here again that produces it. Such is the full and real meaning of the expression.

Righteousness and holiness differ in this respect. Righteousness is the true perception and, of course, the walking in our relative duties as men of God, holiness is rather the rejection in heart and way, according to God's nature, of what is contrary to Him. Holiness, therefore, is a far more absolute thing than righteousness, which takes up what we owe relatively to God and man. It is in contrast with the first man. Adam was good as a creature, but he had no right apprehension of God Himself, or of what evil was according to God. He did not then know sin; there was no evil to know. If one had talked about lust to Adam in the garden of Eden, he must, I believe, have avowed his ignorance of what it meant. Therefore, if the law had been given to Adam, "Thou shalt not covet," he would not have comprehended its meaning, having no experience of sin till afterwards. We have hearts which crave what we have not got, but Adam had not. He was just the sample of creature-goodness in a man. It was not after God, created in the righteousness and holiness of the truth. God made man upright; but uprightness is a different thing from being created in holiness. Upright he was created, and innocent; but the new man is much more, knowing right well, through the Spirit's teaching, what evil is and what good is. Adam only learnt what good and evil are when he fell, never before; he then became conscious of a good that he lost and that he was not, and of an evil that he had fallen into, which God hated and must judge. So when a man is brought to the truth as it is in Jesus, he knew good and evil before with a bad conscience, but now he knows it with a purged and good conscience. There is nothing that could make a conscience so clean as the sacrifice of Jesus. Supposing that any of us were able to live without iniquity to the

end of our days, would this make our conscience good? Not in the least. There would always be a bad conscience, because of the consciousness of past, unremoved, unforgiven sin. No human process, nay, nor giving us a new nature, can get rid of the evil we have done. The sacrifice of Christ has done it perfectly. My evil is there judged according to God. The evil of the old man is dealt with in His death before God. Christ rises from the dead and gives me His life, which is the new man. Christ in resurrection is the very source of the new man in my soul. If this be so, we must deal with the old man. It is to faith a thing done with. Jesus has shown me it as a judged thing in His cross, and I must judge it, and in no way allow my old pride and vanity and folly. I have all still within me, but I must treat it as dead: else I shall grieve the Lord, and bring myself under His hand. We have each of us to watch earnestly against the former conversation; but then it easily happens that a person might be enticed by an evil never fallen into before, because he imagined it was impossible for him so to fall. There is nothing so exposes one to fall, as the notion one could not so turn aside. Self-confidence leads away from dependence on God, and has often been the ruin of a christian man, as far as His glory is concerned.

Thus, the new man is spoken of so as to bring out its contrast with what man was even in his best estate. Yea, Adam, when he came from the hand of God, could not be described in the terms of blessing which are true of every believer now. There is no such thing as restoring to an Adamic condition. A soul when converted now has the place of the second Man; and as He, the Lord, cannot fall, so the Christian has a life that never can be touched. It is as impossible for a Christian to be lost, as

for Christ to be removed from the right hand of God; because He is the life of the Christian. If you say that people can fall away from grace, nothing is more certain than that they may. But if you mean by this, that the life of the Christian can perish, you flatly contradict the word of God. It is a question, then, of understanding the Scriptures. Christ Himself is the life of the Christian: can He fall? Thus it is a virtual denial of Christ Himself, that there should be a doubt allowed about it. All these exhortations are based upon this; that they had learnt Christ, and knew the truth as it is in Jesus. They were already in living relation to Him, and upon this ground all christian exhortations come. Is it even or ever a reasonable thing to talk about fruit till the plant has thoroughly taken root? It would be no use to talk to a baby about the duties of a man. The man must be there, as such, before you can expect to see the discharge of the duties of a man. And so with the Christian, before you can rightly insist on the duties of a Christian. But now that the truth as it is in Jesus is known, you must not allow the old man. He is speaking of practical fruit and walk, because of already being in Christ, and knowing the truth in Him. This ought always to be a great encouragement to a soul. Even if God is exhorting me to self-judgment, it always supposes my previous blessing as a possessor of life everlasting. It is on this ground that God, as it were, thus addresses us. Is it possible that when I have done so much for you, you can be so careless of my will? It is to touch the spring of grace in the soul, in order that we may go on with Him and do His will.

Now some of the results are pressed upon them. “Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth

with his neighbour, for we are members one of another." (Ver. 25.) As they had learnt the truth in Jesus, the shame of falsehood was the more manifest. What is the ground that we have here? We are too apt to take falsehood rather upon the human basis of honour. Many a man would not do it on moral grounds; or he would be too proud to tell a lie; and he that had a certain sense of the fear of God before his eyes, would not do it, because it was a practical denial of God. It is as good as saying that God does not hear. So that whether you look at a mere man in his natural pride, or at a godly man, like a Jew, there you have the grounds on which many would act. But this is not enough for a Christian. It is of great importance for our souls, not only that we should walk well and righteously, but that the motive, character, and extent, should be according to God too. Not only is this exhortation necessary, but there is that coupled with it which we rarely think of in our intercourse one with another: we are here exhorted to speak truth every man with his neighbour, "for we are members one of another." It is looking at Christians only. None but such are members evidently. He wants to connect with Christ the most common duty, which we are in danger of putting upon a lower basis, and the ground he takes is this: — that it is as preposterous and uncomely for a Christian not to tell the plain simple truth to a brother Christian, as for a man to deceive himself. They are part of ourselves. "We are members one of another." Do we realize this? If we did, what would be the effects? Assuredly, one would be perfect plainness in dealing with that which is wrong; another would be a real, hearty desire to set right those who are wrong. It is evident that we could not wish to injure ourselves. And if I regard another as a part of myself, I ought to act

towards them accordingly. In the same way, also, we ought to feel what is contrary to God in another. And as one would greatly desire if awakened to feel one's own sin, to go to God about it, and have our souls set right there, so it should be in having to do one with another. The deeper realizing of this truth would give a stronger desire for the well-being of our fellow-Christians. And yet if it is to be in accordance with God's glory, it is not merely that we should judge what is wrong, but that we should seek to get what is right and according to God. We are apt, where persons have been, for instance, put away from fellowship, to think only of getting rid of the evil; but do we find this where the membership one of another is felt and owned in the presence of God? Even where it comes to the extreme degree of so dealing with one whom we had believed to be a member of the body of Christ, the end of all discipline is to remove the evil, in order that that which is of Christ may shine forth.

"Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath." (Ver. 26.) I take this to be a most important and holy intimation for our souls. There is a notion often that it is wrong for a Christian ever to feel displeased or angry; this and other Scriptures show it may be right. But we must take care what the source, as well as the character, of the anger is. If it is merely about something that affects self, and it therefore takes the form of vindictiveness, this is of course beyond a doubt contrary to all that is of Christ. We find in Him (Mark 3) that He looked round about upon certain persons with anger, showing clearly He had the strongest feeling about that which was contrary to God. It was not merely that He denounced the thing, but the people who were guilty of it. I find the same analogy in the epistles. We are told

not only to cleave to that which is good, but to abhor that which is evil. Man's thought is that it is not for a Christian to judge and to be angry with what is wrong. The word of God tells us there are certain things we ought to judge and others we ought not. I am not to judge what is unseen; I am to judge positive, known evil. There we have plainly and clearly the line drawn by God. You will find that men say, if you speak strongly about the wrong of this thing or that, you are uncharitable. But not so; it is real charity to denounce it, not to let it pass. True love as to this consists in always having the feelings of God about what comes before us. That is the one question. What God has fellowship with, we can have fellowship with; and what God hates, we are not to love or allow. But we must take care that we are in the intelligence of God's mind. "Be ye angry and sin not." There is the greatest possible danger of sinning if you are angry, and therefore is this added. The simple emotion of anger toward one who has sinned may and ought to be a holy feeling; it is provided it rests there. Thus it is felt in God's presence. But how am I to know that I am not sinning in my anger? "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." If there is irritation kept up in the spirit, impatience, dislike, or scorn betrayed, who cannot see that it is not of God? When the sun goes down, it is a time either for your peaceful communion with God, or your indulgence of resentment away from Him. Therefore it is added, "Neither give place to the devil." (Ver. 27.) Where there is the nursing of wrath or the keeping up of grievances in the mind, Satan easily comes in and is not easily dislodged.

In these exhortations, as in the doctrine of the epistle, there is no notion of bettering the nature of man. A new

nature is shown to belong to the Christian: Christ is his life. The practical aim follows that this should be exercised and manifested.

Nevertheless, there is a serious hindrance, for the old man remains, the flesh is still in the Christian; and as the new creature is in no way the result of improving the old, so the old nature is incapable of being absorbed or exalted into the new. They are irreconcileably opposed. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The only course and comfort and duty open to the faithful is to deny and mortify the flesh, so that the new man may be left free to do the will of God.

On the last portion which occupied us, we saw the danger of yielding to anger; it easily degenerates into hatred, and this gives occasion for the devil to enter. We have now another exhortation, which to some might seem hardly called for among Christians. “Let him that stole steal no more.” It is not exactly “him that stole,” but “the stealer.” “Thief” would be too strong; and “he that stole” is too weak. The apostle was led to choose a term so large as to take in every shade of such dishonesty. Do you think the caution needless? Beware lest your self-confidence, and the slight of any word that God has written, ensnare you. There can be no doubt that the Spirit, who inspired the epistle, judged the admonition necessary for all saints, as well as for the Ephesians; yet nowhere do we find an assembly more happy, flourishing, and blessed of God, than the Church in Ephesus. Yet even for them, quickened and raised with Christ, and seated in Him in heavenly places, the Holy Ghost saw its suitability. God knows us better than we know ourselves; and let saints be ever so instructed,

devoted, or earnest, in none of these things, apart from the enjoyment of present communion, apart from actual dependence on God, is there any adequate safeguard. Besides, if a soul, through unwatchfulness, had slipped aside into that which is so degrading even in human eyes, we can readily conceive the force of such a word to the heartbroken and ashamed, in danger of being swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. How little the heart felt its perils, or knew either its own weakness or the power of Satan! Now, restored to judge itself according to God, it owns the value of words like these, which it had once deemed well-nigh useless for the saint. Now, too, it feels how exceeding broad is the Spirit's appeal, comprehending every kind of worldly, professional, or trade custom (no matter how respectable) that is fraudulent, as well as the grosser forms of dishonesty. God is training the new man according to His own wisdom and grace.

How strikingly also such a precept shows that the Christian is on larger, higher, firmer ground than that on which Israel after the flesh stood or rather fell. Never do you hear the law say "Let the stealer steal no more;" its voice must rather be, "Let him die." The law is good if a man use it lawfully; and its lawful application is expressly not to form, guide, and govern the walk of the righteous, but to deal with the lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinful, unholy and profane, and, in short, with whatever is contrary to sound doctrine. Sin, we are told in Romans 6, shall not have dominion over Christians, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace;" and this in a chapter where the question is the holy walk of the saint, not his justification. Yet in the face of this, the clear and uniform teaching of the New

Testament, the tendency of most in Christendom habitually is to go back to law, especially where there is feeble separation from the world. But it is easily understood. For the world does not receive or understand the grace of God, whereas it can appreciate in the letter the righteous law of God. Hence, when the world and the saints are mixed together, the will of man soon takes the upper hand; and as the saint cannot elevate the world to his standing, he must sink to that which he holds in common with the world; and thus both meet once more on Jewish ground, as if the cross of Christ had never been, and the Holy Ghost were not sent down from heaven to gather believers out of a mixed condition into the assembly of God apart from the world. Even for the individual Christian, as well as for the Church, and most of all for God's truth, grace, and glory, the loss has been incalculable. For the ordinary walk has been reduced to a string of negatives, save in public acts of philanthropy, religions activity, or ritual observances, which the Christian shares with any and everybody that will join him. It is not occupation with good according to God's will; still less is it suffering for the sake of Christ and of righteousness from a world which knows them not. This is not Christianity, though it is the state and the system of most Christians. Did Christ ever obey from the fear of judgment? Was not His life a surrender of Himself to the holy will and pleasure of His Father? So our souls must be occupied with God's grace in Christ, if we are to find strength in pleasing Him. The mere avoidance of evil, the not doing this or that, is below our calling. Do we indeed desire to know and to do His will as His children? Are we zealous in learning to do well, no less than careful to cease from each evil way? If not, the day will come when we may begin to do evil again,

and with a conscience the less sensitive, because we have learnt truth which we do not carry out.

Very beautiful, therefore, is the apostolic exhortation on the positive side. “But rather let him labour [idleness is neither right nor safe], working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to distribute to him that needeth.” (Ver. 28.) Thus does the Spirit cheer and direct the man whose hands were once put forth in unworthy ways; thus does He open a happy path where grace can vindicate its power, spite of a dishonest nature and habit; and he who was the stealer before he knew the Saviour’s name, may now have fellowship with the spirit and practice of the great apostle (Acts 20:33-35), yea, and of the Master Himself, remembering His words, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. To live is the worldly man’s object in labour; to give is the christian motive. It is not a mere question of chance surplusage, but an express object, especially for him who has the consciousness of the mercy that delivered him from covetous sin and its shame and judgment. Only the toil must be about what is good and honest. In vain will you plead a benevolent or religious use of ill-gotten gain! No employment that is contrary to God’s will is good for the Christian, but should be given up at once. The covenant of Sinai never enunciated such a motive for toil as this. To talk about the ten commandments as the rule for the Christian’s walk now, is to go back from the sun which rules the day to the moon which rules the night; it is to eclipse Christ by Moses under the delusive profession of doing God service. In general, what the law exacted from those under it on the principle of right, the Christian is responsible on the principle of grace to exceed in every

possible way. The scope of obedience is immensely increased; the inward motives are searched out and laid bare; the very tendency to violence, corruption, and falsehood is judged in its roots, and suffering wrongfully and withal in love takes the place of earthly righteousness for the disciples. Such is the unquestionable teaching of our Lord and of His apostles; it is darkened, undermined, and denied, by those who insist on judaising the Church by putting the Christian under the law as his rule of life. Truly, they “understand not what they say nor whereof they affirm.”

Next, it is not our deeds only that have to be considered, but our words. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.” (Ver. 29.) Worthless language is to be eschewed as one rejects good-for-nothing fruit; if it were on the tongue, let the unprofitable word proceed no farther. Unclean allusion we shall find specified and forbidden in the chapter following. Here I conceive the circle is more comprehensive. Many who would neither utter nor hear impure conversation may often have to bemoan the utterance and the sanction of unsavoury discourse. Better to be silent if there be not (such is the force) something good for needful edification. The need measures the service, and love builds up instead of puffing up as knowledge does. It is equally true that “in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin,” and that “the lips of the righteous feed many;” they “know what is acceptable;” and those who hear are refreshed and blessed.

Hitherto we have had grounds of holy action, as well as guards against sin, found in the features of the new

man. But this, we know, does not give us the full character and power of the christian man. The holy Spirit of God dwells in him. This blessed but solemn truth is now pressed in its practical bearing. We are said (Eph. 2:22) to be built together for an habitation of God in Spirit; and therefore do the apostles exhort us (Eph. 4) to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called. But there is an individual indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as well as His relation to the house of God. We have been sealed by the Spirit, appropriated thereby to God on the ground of accomplished redemption. The precious blood of Christ has washed away our sins; in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of God's grace. Thus, His sacrifice has effaced before God and to faith all our evil, and a new nature is ours in Christ; so that the Holy Spirit can come and dwell in us, and seal us for the day of redemption, when our body shall be transformed into the likeness of the glory of Christ, as surely as our souls are now quickened into His life. In presence of this infinite present privilege and pledge of glory for ever, the apostle adds, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." He is the spring of energy to strengthen the saint unto all that is well-pleasing to God. But this supposes that there is self-judgment and dependence on God. Otherwise we grieve Him, and are made to feel, not His power, but our own wretched unfaithfulness.

Again, it seems strange that any Christian should be so unintelligent as to confound the word here with "quench not the Spirit" in 1 Thessalonians 5:19. The context (ver. 20) there shows plainly that it is a warning not to hinder the smallest real manifestation of the Holy Ghost in a

saint, no matter how feeble he might be; and the history of Christendom to the present hour proves how much the precept was needed, and how little the apostolic injunction has been attended to. But the passage in Ephesians 4 is a personal concern for every saint and his own conversation every day.

Another thing to be noted is the difference from the language of Psalm 51: “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” But the apostle, even when he presses that we should not grieve the Holy Ghost, never hints at His being taken away. On the contrary, he in the same breath assures us that we were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. Where can there be a fuller way of intimating our personal security than such a sentence? To what are we to attribute this difference? Not, I need hardly say, to a higher inspiration in Paul the apostle, than in David the king; but to the necessary and revealed modification of the Spirit’s relation to the saint, since Jesus died and rose and went to heaven. Till then there was no such thing as the Spirit given to abide with the believer for ever. He blessed souls then, wrought in and by them, filled with joy and power betimes; but indwelling, as the Christian has and knows it now, there was and could not be till the glorification of Jesus, because of sin put away by His blood. Hence we are told not to grieve the Spirit, but are never, since He was given, supposed to deprecate His departure. Unquestionably, this aggravates the sin of a Christian and imparts poignancy and bitterness to his self-reproach in that case; but even this is intended of God for the graver warning of His child. The verse, therefore, clearly proves, on the one hand, the danger of sinning and thus of grieving the Spirit; and, on the other, the

security of the saint even in and spite of such sorrowful circumstances. He is brought to God, reconciled, washed, sanctified, justified; he has eternal life and shall never perish; he is sealed of the Spirit, and that seal, who can break? If he fall into sin, assuredly God will see to it and chasten, yea, unto death; for He will neither make light of his evil nor condemn himself with the world. So Peter exhorts the godly to walk in holy obedience, and while they called on Him as Father who, without respect of persons, judges according to each one's work, to pass their time of sojourn in fear; at the same time, far from weakening their confidence, he proceeds, "forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold..... but with the precious blood of Christ." Thus, the truth of God has the effect of attracting and strengthening the affections, even when it sets us with our faces in the dust, while human error, as it weakens the full grace of God, so it fails thoroughly to humble the soul. But what a truth it is for the believer, that he has within the constant presence of a divine person, the Holy Ghost, the witness of all that passes these! How careful should we be that we grieve Him not! But it is not a truth for conscience only, but pregnant with consolation; for He dwells in us evermore, not because we are worthy of such a heavenly denizen, but in virtue of the worth of Jesus and the perfectness with which His work has cleansed us in God's sight from our sins; and He is in us for our joy, and strength, and blessing evermore, through and in Christ the Lord. May we be enabled, always confident, always to pray, and not to faint!

The doctrine of the Holy Ghost's presence in the individual believer, sealing him for redemption-day, has

been already seen, and seems to be bound up in the closest way with practical holiness, as a motive and a guard, no less than as the power. For what more solemnly affecting than the remembrance of such an inhabitant ever dwelling in the believer's body? and what more certain than that He is the Spirit, not of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind? We may be utter weakness, and the natural heart deceitful and treacherous beyond human conception. But this is not the only truth. The Christian is characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Is He weak? Or if ill might be His, is He in the believer the passive, inactive witness of every fault and infirmity? Is He not, on the contrary, within Him to associate his affections with Christ, to glorify Christ, taking of the things of Christ and showing them to him? Doubtless, He may be and is grieved by allowed folly, and carelessness, and evil, and as to this we have just been seriously cautioned; but it would be well for such as speak incessantly of the good-for-nothingness of the flesh (which is most clear and certain) to bear in mind that the believer, the Christian, is no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit, seeing that the Spirit of God dwells in him. Meet it is, therefore, that sin, all and every sin, should be confessed and judged; but it is neither genuine humility nor the faith of God's elect to ignore the blessed and encouraging as well as serious fact, that the Spirit of God is in us to give all strength in revealing Christ to our souls. It may be wholesome, unquestionably, to learn the painful lesson of Romans 7:7, and seq.; but to rest there is to prove that it has been ill learnt. For the proper place of the Christian is, as to this, the end of the chapter, ushering him into the still deeper exercises and the more unselfish sufferings of Romans 8, with the liberty, and

power, and hope, and security which it so abundantly shows to be our portion through grace. The redemption of our body and of creation outside is not yet come; but He who is its earnest is within us.

This being so, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you with all malice.” (Ver. 31.) The very nearness into which the family of God is brought may become a snare unless there be watchfulness and a simple looking to Christ. But the Holy Ghost gives quarter to no evil feeling whatever. These are the breaches of our nearness; in the next chapter (ver. 3 and seq.) we shall find the abuses of it.

If we come to particulars, “all bitterness,” I think, denotes every form of the sharp, unsparing mood which repels souls instead of winning them, and makes the most of the real or imagined faults of others. The “wrath and anger,” next following, refer to the outburst of passion, and the more settled vindictive resentment, to which the indulgence of acrimony gives rise, a “clamour and evil speaking” are their respective counterparts in words: all flowing from the deep-seated fountain of “all malice,” which is finally condemned in our verse. Thus, as we were warned against dishonesty in word and deed, before the allusion to the Holy Spirit’s seal, so now, after it, hatred in its various parts and expressions is denounced. It is, alas, natural to the first man Adam — the same corruption and violence which brought the flood on the world of old, but, spite of God’s judgment, renewed itself, and will, till Christ deal with man and Satan in person.

But, as was observed in the previous verses, bare abstinence from the mind and workings of the flesh suffices not. There is the activity of good in Christ, the second Man, and this the Spirit produces as well as demands in the Christian. Hence it is added, “Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you.” Clearly, therefore, It is a question of showing grace; and the pattern of it all is God in Christ, not in the law, holy, just and good as the commandment is. But good as the law was and is, Christ is the best of all, the genuine and only foil and perfect expression of what God is. And leaving the law to deal with the wicked (1 Tim. 1), as the apostle expressly declares is its lawful use, we who are dead with Christ are not under law but grace, which, by the power of the Spirit, strengthens us according to its own character and gives communion with Him who is its source.

The reader will notice that there is a departure from the Authorized Version of verse 32. It is done advisedly. Why king James’ translators deserted the Greek, followed by Wycliffe, Coverdale, and even the Rhemish, it is hard to say, especially as Beza, who often influenced them, is here accurate. The erroneous rendering obscures the very grace of God which is set before us as our spring and pattern, and tends to countenance the error that Christ was the procuring cause of His love, instead of being the blessed and infinite channel of its communication to us, the only possible means in which even His love could holily and justly avail for us. It is a part of the same error to think of God as “our reconciled Father,” or to say that Christ “died to reconcile Him to us.” Atonement was necessary beyond a doubt, the

expiation of our sins by the blood of Christ. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” But God was in Christ reconciling; it is we (not He) “who have now received the reconciliation.” “And you that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works. yet now hath he reconciled.” Such is the uniform doctrine of Scripture. How blessedly all is put and kept in its place! The atonement is that aspect of Christ’s work, which is toward God, to put away sin by suffering the divine judgment of it in His own person; reconciliation, contrariwise, is toward us, to bring us back in Christ unto God. Both are most true; to confound them is to lose much and weaken all; and what is more serious, it is more or less to misrepresent the character of God, as if He were turned by Christ from an angry judge into a loving Father. God is love as truly as He is light. It is what He is, not what He is made.

2 If honour to those that labour and help to maintain them or their families in case of need are supposed to involve a title to interfere, the worldly and evil source of such a thought becomes apparent. Would they purchase the gift of God with money, or reduce a servant of Christ into the hireling of men? On the other hand, let us beware of mere human independence, which is simply pride, where it is least becoming and most injurious.

3 Some suppose that the truth in Jesus is, “that ye have put off, as concerns your former conversation, the old man..... and have put on the new man,” etc. (Ver 22-24). so Dr. Eadie and Mr. Peile, whose rendering seems to me quite consistent with the context, notwithstanding the depreciatory notice of Alford and Ellicott. Mr. Darby takes the version and connection to be that the truth in

Jesus is not exactly “that ye should,” nor “that ye have,” but “your having put off,” etc. I have not, however, altered the rendering and the comment, which remain here as before. The reader can judge for himself.

Ephesians 5

What a mighty principle opens here on the saints! “Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children.” (Ver. 1.) What limits can there be if we are exhorted to imitate God Himself! Nor is it in any way now an assertion of claim, as the law was, on man, standing on his own responsibility before God as a creature. God has revealed Himself in grace; still He is God and none other; and if He has communicated to us His own nature, a lesser, lower standard there could not be. It would dishonour Himself and the very grace He has shown us, and nowhere more fully than in the earlier parts of this epistle. It would be, too, the most grievous loss to His children beloved, whom He would train and bless yet more and more even in this scene of evil and sorrow, turning the most adverse circumstances into an occasion of teaching us what He is in the depths of His grace and filling ourselves with the sense of it so as to form our hearts and fashion our ways, as we forget ourselves and live above our own habits and the conventionalities of men in the truth of Christ.

Neither law nor even promise ever opened such a field as this. The very call so to imitate God supposes the perfect grace in which we stand: indeed it would be insupportable otherwise. No doubt, it is most humbling to reflect how little we have answered to His call; but even the sense of our previous shortcomings where it is deep, if we do not lose sight of His grace, is turned to precious account, and we are growing and going on with Him when we may little think it. The law demanded what man ought to render to God: to love Him and our

neighbour is no more than our plain and bounden duty. The promise held out the hope of a Seed of blessing, not to Israel only, but to all families of the earth. But now, after promise was despised and law was broken, God has displayed Himself in Christ, and, while accomplishing all in Christ, has brought out higher counsels in infinite grace to us in such sort that His own character, thus displayed, becomes the only suitable pattern to which He would conform His children even here. “Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children; and walk in love as Christ also loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” (Ver. 1, 2.)

To forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave, is blessed; but this, though after His own heart and ways, is not enough. It is surely divine in its source, and impossible in its full character and extent to flesh; but it is in view of man and man’s failure, and of the outbreaks of an evil nature. He would cherish this in us. It is the fruit of His grace, and most needful, in such a world as this; most wholesome for His saints in their intercourse and dealing with each other. But it is far from being the expression of all He is and would have us enjoy and reflect. There is the outgoing of good according to His heart, where there is no question of evil to be forgiven, which is in a certain sense only negative, however real and sweet it may be. Here all is positive, flowing fresh as it were and above human thought. Hence the word is, “Walk in love, as Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us,” etc. To be forgiven was our abject, urgent need, if we were indeed to have the smallest comfort from God or hope of deliverance from wrath and of blessedness hereafter. It was grace, of course, the

grace of God, but addressed to, if not bounded by, man's need. But now we stand on the new ground of the excellency of Christ and the exercise of that which is proper to God in the activity of His own nature. Hence it is not the sin-offering that is here alluded to, nor is it simply the blood or the sufferings of our blessed Lord, but His delivering Himself for us, in matchless love, "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

One would not be mistaken on such a theme, nor weaken for a moment the certainty that in the Lord's sufferings on the cross there are depths found there only; but these are not and could not be put before us as a pattern, seeing that they pertain exclusively to Him who bore our sins in His own body and was made sin for us, meeting that judgment of God, which no man, nor angel, nor creature, nor new creature could share with Him, however blessed through it, and filled with thankful, adoring delight in Him who was thus alone, not only for us, but for God's glory, the object of the wrath of God felt and must execute against sin. But here it is a question of that which sets forth the admirable love of Christ in all its positive fragrance and beauty; and this in order to call out, in the energy of the Holy Ghost, the answering ways of the new nature in the saints; for indeed Christ is our life, and what bounds are there to the power of the Spirit who dwells in us? Love lends to service in self-abnegation, whether in Him perfectly, or in us according to our measure; but surely it gives and forms the spirit of service, as we see in our blessed Lord. (Phil. 2)

Nevertheless, the more sweet and blessed, the nearer it is to evil, unless it is maintained in divine power and

self-judgment. It brings together; it awakens spiritual affections; but what is begun in the Spirit may end in fleshly corruption, as we see at Corinth, no less than it may seek fleshly perfection of a religious form, as we see in Galatia. Accordingly the apostle proceeds to warn the Ephesian saints against the dangers to which free familiar converse might expose, unless sustained by the Holy Ghost. “But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be even named among you, as becometh saints.” (Ver. 3.) These lusts of the flesh were not only not to be allowed, but not even to be named. They were God’s holy ones, saints; and the question now was of that which becomes (not mere men but) saints.

Nor does he confine his warning to unbridled licentiousness or the covetous desire of that which might gratify man, but extends it to unholiness of language too, whether openly shameful or under the veil of refinement — “and [no] filthiness, and foolish talking, and jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.” (Ver. 4.) Here again, not merely the absence of what is indecorous in the Christian, but the positive side is brought in and the heart’s reference to God’s goodness, which breaks out in thanksgiving. “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, or unclean person, or covetous man, who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” (Ver. 5.) It is most important to remember, that let sovereign grace do what it will let it go out to the vilest, let it cleanse the most defiled, the moral ways of God remain inflexible. His nature does not change. He hates and never can tolerate iniquity. His love may find and has found a glorious solution of the difficulty in the cross of Christ; but God and sin never call walk or dwell together.

The children of God have opposite dangers to this, and need to watch against their feelings. They may be quick to exclaim in some flagrant case that there can be no life there; they may be too precipitate in giving their confidence where there is a fair show in flesh. Some of the most solemn departures into the world have been where few, if any, doubted; as on the other hand, who has not known the comfort of seeing the painful appearances which repelled one fade away so as to let the grace of Christ shine out more and more, or flesh was judged by the truth in the sight of God? Thus those, of whom most doubted because of untoward looks, at last won the confidence of all. Sometimes it may have needed a serious dealing of God: severe sickness, reverses of fortune, domestic sorrow, before the soul was set right; still it was, though late in the day. Both these extremes teach us the need of waiting on God, instead of trusting our own impressions, that we may judge righteous judgment. The natural heart may take advantage of grace, but ere long will manifest its unremoved evil. Perverse men may rise up, wolves may enter, and sheep may for a while be deceived. But God abides, and the word of His grace: why should we be disquieted? Let us have faith in God, imitate Him as children beloved, and walk in love, not only because, but as Christ loved us; and, whatever the result, we shall have the comfort of pleasing God, meanwhile kept from haste one way or another. Watching for evil is very far from “giving of thanks,” and indeed incompatible with it. But then let us never lower the standard of the ways which God looks for in His children. If no corrupt person have an inheritance in His kingdom, never treat such sin lightly now. “Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God

upon the sons of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them." (Ver. 6, 7.) To be partners with such in any way is grave for a saint. Let us take heed.

The eighth verse of our chapter gives another ground of appeal. The exhortation to walk is neither in view of the calling wherewith we are called (Eph. 4:1), nor specially in contrast with other Gentiles, alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4:17, 18), nor yet in love only (Eph. 5:27), but "as children of light." "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." The change being thus complete, the word is "walk as children of light." Be consistent with what you are, not merely with what you ought to be. We are light, yea, light in the Lord — at once the ground, and character, and measure of that which becomes our ways as Christians: let us walk accordingly. How comforting is the call of grace to holy ways! The most solemn appeal reminds us of our blessing, and its security, even when urging us on with ever such closeness. How holy is our standing in Christ that God Himself should be able to say of us, "Ye are light in the Lord." If He does; should we not say it of ourselves, both in privilege and responsibility? Let us look to Him that, thus set outside all taint (for there is nothing purer than light), we may go forward, showing that light which we are now in the Lord. It is in the light we walk, and by it we should judge all, for light we are. God would repudiate a lower standard or an atmosphere less pure. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, if we are His children, we are children of light. We are never said to be love (which is God's nature and prerogative), though surely called to love as born of Him and knowing Him in Christ. How completely law disappears as the motive or the mould of our walk.

“For the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” No doubt these are the characteristics of the gracious operation of the Spirit; and this may have led to the substitution of “the Spirit” for light in the common text. But there can be no reasonable question that the true thought and word in verse 9 is “the light,” which is not more borne out by external evidence than by the scope of the context. In Galatians 5 it is the fruit, not of the light, but of the Spirit, because in contrast with the works of the flesh — ways of uncleanness, violence against God and man, tampering with and subjection to the deceits of the enemy; whereas the Spirit’s fruit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which, as the apostle emphatically says to the law-affecters, there is no law. Here it is in contrast, not with legal proclivities and the workings of flesh, which the law alike provokes and condemns, but with the darkness which we once were when without the Lord. But now we are called to walk as children of light, which is our very nature in Him, and we are reminded that its fruit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. God’s exceeding riches and grace in no way weakens, but rather confirms, the display of His moral principles, and makes them good even in us His children, whatever we may have been and are naturally. The new life He has given us in Christ answers to His own goodness and righteousness and truth. It could not be — it ought not to be — otherwise; nor would the renewed heart calmly bear that He should be dishonoured or even misrepresented in the objects of His favour. He implants in us the desire of pleasing Himself, and He watches over us that this desire should be neither vague nor uninfluential, but bear fruit — the

fruit of the light, “proving,” as it is added, “what is acceptable unto the Lord.” (Ver. 10.)

Again, it is not enough for our souls to refuse to be partakers with the children of disobedience, as in verses 6, 7. We must have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even expose them. (Ver. 11.) It is all a part of our marvellous place and responsibility as being children of light. It is not law, simply condemning as by an applied outward standard, but an inward and most searching divine capacity, which, whatever the love that is the source and end, spares evil even less, but brings in good by the Holy Ghost in Christ. “For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret [i.e., the doers of the fruitless works of darkness]; but all things when reproved [or exposed] are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make [or is made] manifest is light.” (Ver. 12, 13.) It is the property of light to manifest itself and all things else; and this is quite as true spiritually as in nature.

But there is more in the Lord’s mind here concerning us. He would have us in the full enjoyment of the blessing, and not content to possess it only. There are dead things and persons around us, and their influence when allowed is most injurious. “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall enlighten thee.” (Ver. 14.) It is not giving us life as if we were dead, nor even light as if we were not light already, but rather shining upon us who are light in Him, yet slumbering carelessly in the midst of that which is dead and deadening. How vigilant His love which thus thinks of us, that our cup of blessing may run over and our souls may be delivered from that which degrades

Him and even us in Him, that we may be full of that which we are as His own! How every word of His, how every circumstance of ours, calls us to see how carefully we walk (ver. 15), not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the fit opportunity because the days are evil! We are furnished indeed; but constant watching and dependence are needed. The due season must be, looked at and sought, let it be ever so costly, if, in these evil days, we would not be senseless, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. (Ver. 16, 17.) Worldly excitement must be avoided, and those incentives to nature which jaded man craves, wherein is excess. Yet we may and should be absorbed with a power above nature, which excludes not only what is evil, but the power of present things. “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things to him who is God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.” (Ver. 18-21.) Speaking “to yourselves” means, I suppose, and might be translated, to one another, as in Ephesians 4:32; speaking to one another in every form wherein the joy of the Church expressed itself. I understand them all to be the sacred metrical compositions of Christians, outpourings of worship and praise, or of holy feeling, the word “spiritual” being added to the last or lowest class of them to mark even their consecration to the Lord. This is true and holy joy. May we cultivate it in simplicity. In truth, we have a goodly portion. What can we not thank Him for, who is our God and Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus? What else makes us so happily submit to one another in His fear?

We now enter upon the special earthly relations. The general exhortations we have had, which concern the saints of God as such — children of God and members of Christ's body. But now the Holy Ghost shows that He is not indifferent to the relations which these saints may sustain, either towards one another, or towards others upon the earth. There might be, for instance, husbands and wives, both of them Christians; or there might be only one in this relationship converted, the other being still a Jew or a heathen; and so with the relation of fathers and children, masters and servants. For the present we have only to do with that which pertains to the nearest tie upon earth, that of husband and wife. And we shall find that the Holy Ghost most amply provides for the wants of the children of God bound thus together; so that whatever may be their difficulties, they may find gracious instruction and grave exhortation, and not merely commands in reference to the circumstances in which they stand before God — for this is not strictly the form in which christian regulation comes before us. Of course, there may be and are, precepts and commandments throughout the New Testament. Indeed the one who most brings out love presses commandments most; for it is in the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, where the greatest stress is laid upon such injunctions; and yet we all know that there is no part of Scripture which brings out God's love to us more strikingly and constantly. It is, therefore, the greatest possible mistake to suppose that there is any inconsistency between God's love, and the strictest injunction that His authority lays upon His children.

Still it is undeniable that as the general character of christian instruction does not take the shape of

commandments of a legal shape, so we are not set under the Mosaic commandments to form our present thoughts and feelings and course as Christians. Nay, we have got nothing analogous to the law, but a decided and complete contrast, according to Scripture, for “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Commandments we have; but they suppose and regulate life, and are calculated to bring the obedience of Christ (1 Peter 1) into exercise; and there is nothing more beautiful to the soul, nor more glorifying to God. Ordinarily the way in which instruction comes in the New Testament is thus: there is a relationship formed, and according to its character, amply unfolded and enforced in the word, we have to glorify God. As this is true in natural things, so the Spirit of God uses an every-day relationship as the occasion of bringing out the spiritual one that answers to it. And our hearts being occupied with the exceeding grace that has formed the new and eternal tie, we may find not only a motive, but a pattern and power to glorify God in the natural as well as the spiritual one. There is one place where this comes out more strikingly than in the first of these relationships on which the Holy Ghost here expands peculiarly. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” The opening comparison which He uses, before entering into the spiritual relationship which is brought before us after the figure of marriage, the very first thought is to present the headship of the man, as having special force in married life. We all know that, apart from marriage, the man is the head of the woman. That is, if there were no such thing as marriage, man has a place which woman has not — a place entirely independent of character. We may find a man imbecile, and a woman with firmness and wisdom; but nothing can alter God’s

order. We may find a child endowed with great prudence, and the parents unwise and weak. Still the relationship is altogether apart from the peculiar character, and state, and condition of those either in the superior place or in the subordinate. And it is of great importance that we should have the thing settled in our souls, that no circumstances whatever warrant a breach of Gods arrangements. There are trying circumstances which make the difficulty immense in either relationship. But it is of deep consequence to remember that the rights of God's order always abide; that nothing ever justifies disobedience of His will. There may be cases where obedience of the natural order of God would be a sin: there are none where disobedience is a duty. You cannot be required to disobey under any circumstances. But there are crises where you must obey God rather than man. It is an exceeding mercy that the times are few indeed, where obeying God involves an apparent breach of natural order and moral duty. But it may be so. You will find, for instance, in the beginning of the Acts, Peter and John charged, by the powers of that day which governed in Israel, not to teach in the name of Jesus. What could they do but fall back upon the authority of God? They could put it to those very rulers that their consciences were bound to God before men. Thus the first great principle remains and is plain, before we enter upon particulars, that obedience is always the part of the Christian.

Hence, flowing out of the general call to submission in the fear of Christ (for Christ is the one brought before us with continual honour in this epistle), the Spirit takes up this first appropriate place for a christian woman, and lays down the word, "Wives, submit yourselves unto

your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Although this may appear extraordinarily strong language, when we remember what husbands are or may be, still it is a great thing to be always certain that God is right. To human prudence it may seem little guarded. Perhaps you have even to do with an unconverted husband! But only bring in the Lord, and at once you see the power that will make submission easy, and you learn the measure to which submission is to be carried. But more than that, you have the guard against the abuse of the principle; "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." The Lord is brought in, and this sets everything right. If it is a question of trial or suffering, still the word is the same. The Lord may put us through great difficulties and dangers. What is the proper place of the Christian under such circumstances? Unqualified submission. Because I ought to be sure that, whatever may be the breaking up and down which these trials may occasion to one's spirit, yet whatever the Lord does is the best and happiest and most strengthening in the end to my soul, the Lord being incapable of any one thing for me that is not for enduring good to the praise of His own name.

In this epistle it is not merely God's control that is brought out, but special relationship. Here it is the Lord loving His own, with a love that has sacrificed everything for their sake. How can I doubt the blessedness and value of submitting myself to the Lord? The Christian wife may have a husband; and it may be very painful and hard to bear all. Perhaps he makes nothing of you, and asks often what is unreasonable. But what will make the burden light, though felt? "Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." I

am to submit unto my husband as unto the Lord: let me only see the Lord in the matter, instead of his inconsiderateness and bad temper, and my path is plain. It is made a matter, not of mere duty, but of confidence in the Lord as above everything in His love, care, and government. This is what the Holy Ghost first starts with, and makes to be the basis of all the various instructions that He is about to bring forth. He begins with the grand truth, that the christian woman is entitled to submit to her husband as unto the Lord. So that it is not made a question simply of affection, which would be human: this is a most necessary thing as a natural element, but it would be true if a person were not a Christian at all. Neither is it a question of that which the husband expects, or of what I might think to be right. All these things belong to the region of proper feeling and morality. But the important thing is that God cannot be with a christian woman who walks in the habitual slighting of His ground for her in her relationship as a wife. He will not allow a Christian to walk merely on moral or conventional grounds. They may be right enough in their place, but, if I am a Christian, I have a higher calling; and then, no matter what may be the difficulty — even if the one to whom I owe my subjection be not a Christian — here comes in the blessed direction, “Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” He entitles me to see Himself behind the person of the husband; and I have got to follow Him and to submit myself to Him. In this thought there would be great comfort for the christian wife who is ever so tried. But then the limit of the trial comes in — for there is a limit in every path — and it is this: that God never puts me in any circumstances where I am free to commit a sin. Therefore, supposing a

husband were to command that which would be positively sinful, thence at once I learn that I am not bound, because I am told to submit to my husband, as unto the Lord. The Lord would never sanction what is sinful. He may put me through the sieve, and I may not at first understand the goodness or the need of it; but faith constantly finds its strength and guidance in the Lord's wisdom — in trusting Him, and not my wisdom in understanding Him. And you will find that we grow in wisdom by being content to take the place of having none. If my confidence is in His wisdom, I shall gather wisdom and grow in it. Our Lord was perfectly man; and although always perfect in every condition of life, yet the great mark of His perfectness lay in this — He was ever the dependent One who looked up to God, and who could say, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" There was at once for man the lowest, but in truth, the highest place. He understood the secret of His own relationship to God the Father. And although this was true of Christ as of none others, yet it is surely true of every believer in measure.

But we have most carefully to watch ourselves in this matter. Wherever there is the smallest tendency to slip out of the path of submission, we have to search and see, if we are wise according to God. Nature never likes to be subject. And wherever there is a danger of pleading the truth of God for any act that might seem to be a want of submission to the authority of another, I have need to watch myself with greater jealousy than in any other thing. When we are found in a path where submission is the word, let us leave room to bring in the Lord. In order to give power and faith to our obedience, and a holy character to it, I should see that it is the Lord

I am obeying, even while there is an earthly authority to which I am subjected. The blessed truth that the Lord was about to introduce begins to open to us. “For a husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church: he is Saviour of the body.” (Ver. 23.) In this we have an allusion to the near relationship, which is intended to show us how we ought to walk towards one another in this respect. Although He, and none but He, is the Saviour, there is no taking the Church or the saint out of the place of subjection, but expressly the reverse.

“Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in everything.” Such is the general principle. But then, you will observe, there is always a measure and a guard in every such word of Scripture. It is not simply said, “Therefore, let the wives be subject in everything to their own husbands,” but “Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be,” etc. There I find that Christ’s own blessed way of caring for the assembly and dealing with it in its due subjection to the Lord, is brought in as the pattern of wives towards their own husbands. But it is when we come to the higher of the two relationships, that we have the Holy Ghost bringing out its character more clearly. “Husbands, love your wives.” Here we find what the snare of the husband might be. First, the wife is to look to her temper, that she discipline her spirit in thorough submission to her husband. It is not said to her, to love her husband, but to submit herself to him. But Satan might take advantage, and (they being in the relationship) the husband might be wanting in tender care and affection. There is the ruling and guiding the wife; but what he is exhorted to here is that which his circumstances most need, and which would be most for

his own soul's good and the comfort of his wife. So that the word is, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." What a holy standard! What a most unselfish, considerate, pure, and heavenly Exemplar is brought before us, in order that the relationship, which might be easily degraded, should have and keep its due elevation; and that even the poorest saints on earth, so bound together, might have the light and love of heaven shining upon them.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Thus we have the love of Christ to the church set forth as the model according to which the christian husband is to seek that his own love to his wife should be conformed. Look at its source and character: "Christ also loved the assembly." All flows out of this. Need I, even as a man, say, that love, as it is what ought to precede a marriage, so is the only secret which, in nature, makes the marriage happy when it is formed? The love of Christ that is shown us here is taken in from first to last, as one unbroken whole. It is well to remember it in married life: the love that was true before the tie was formed, is a love that abides when it is formed, and that should grow unto the end.

Certainly it was so perfectly in our Lord. He loved the church. It is a question of a very special affection here on the part of Christ. It is not the general truth of God's love, who loved the world even; but no relationship was formed with the world. The important thing to look at

here is that, although it is a love that exists before the relationship, it finds its proper exercise in it, and ever continues its real strength and joy. And if we turn aside from looking at the earthly thing to that which is set forth by it, how great the grace, and how rich the blessing! Once it was a joy for our hearts to realize that God could love sinners, and so love as to spend His Son upon us, sinners as we were. But there is another kind of love that we know now. God has taken the relationship of a Father to us; at any rate He has brought us into that of children by Jesus Christ to Himself. We are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Accordingly the Father loves us with a father’s heart; it is not only that He loves the creature as God, but He loves us as a father — yea, as the Father of our Lord Jesus loved Him, and not only in the measure in which a human parent regards his children. In such a circle there might be complacency and delight; and when we think what and who we are, to think that such an one as God the Father could delight in us now in this world, is most wondrous! that He should infinitely more love us than an earthly father does the child that he loves best, and that this love should extend towards the weakest and most needy of His family! There is also a conditional love towards those that are walking faithfully, and St. John brings this out in John 14, 15. But now I am speaking of unfailing, personal love in the relationship in which God stands as Father to His children, as such; which does not only pity, but look with pleasure upon and take delight in them now, spite of everything that is calculated to turn aside or weaken His love. Ought I not, as in Christ, to be as sure of this, as I am of my own existence as a man? yea, to have a better knowledge and certainty of what His love is towards me,

than of anything that affects me as one living on the earth? I have that in me which is not proof against the deceptions of the world outside. But in the things of God, where faith lives, it is not so. There is, there ought to be, divine certainty.

Where God clearly reveals Himself, the soul should receive it in humbleness of mind; and the more humble, the more sure, because the ground of the assurance is that God has revealed it to us. It is a question of Himself and not of us at all. If this be so, what a wonderful place it is to be in Christ! It is quite true that Christ loved me, but here it is the Church — "the assembly;" and Christ has a special love for His assembly, which I am entitled to appropriate and count on. This makes the gathering together of the children of God as the assembly to be so precious, and shows the all-importance of not reducing it to a voluntary society, small or great. The moment you bring in the will of man, you virtually and at once destroy the divine ground which Scripture assumes. Whereas, if you see that God has formed a certain bond in the Holy Ghost for the glory of His Son among those who belong to Him on the earth now, and that Christ regards those who are within that bond with a perfect and most peculiar love; then it is the greatest possible joy that our own souls should enter into His love, and next that we should seek to act by His word upon the other members of the body of Christ, that they may believe and enjoy it also. It is not a part only, but He "loved the assembly." The reason why I use the word "assembly" is that people often have a very vague notion about the Church. The word is usually and completely misapplied in the present day. It is said of a religious building, or of a particular party, in particular of what

may be dominant anywhere. But bring in “the assembly,” and understand by it the whole body of those that God calls out from this world by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and there you learn the special love that God has revealed in Christ, not merely to the soul, but to the assembly which is His body on earth.

Of course, the death of Christ was essential, in order that the gospel should now be preached to the world. This, too, is the ground on which the heavens and earth will be cleared of all that now pollutes and defiles. Everything for the justification of God in the past, and for the outflow of the love of God in the future, is founded upon the death of Christ. Hence the momentous value of His redemption, for earth and heaven, for Jew, Gentile, and Church of God, for time and eternity. But, besides, there is great force in the word, “He delivered himself up for it.” There was nothing in Christ that He did not give. It is not what He did, nor only what He suffered, but He gave Himself. Of course, it implies all that was in Him and of Him, but it goes a great deal farther, because it is absolute self-renunciation in love for the sake of the object that He loved; the perfect pattern of the very fulness of love, which it is quite beyond any human relationship to emulate. Justly does the Spirit, in addressing the christian husband, show us that Christ in all things has the pre-eminence; “He delivered himself up for us.” What is the consequence? The Church is without sin before God — sins are blotted out for ever — redemption is effected — Satan is defeated — divine wrath and judgment borne — ordinances, which were against those that were under them, are nailed to the cross — the enmity is gone — the new man is formed; and all this, and much more than

this, founded upon Christ's surrender of Himself. The effect for us is that here we have, in unclouded light, without doubt or question, Himself in love, as the object of our souls to delight in and submit to and serve and worship evermore.

I have no more right to believe that Christ gave Himself for me, than I have to believe that my iniquities are completely purged out by His precious blood. If I believe the one, I owe it to God to believe the other; and the ground of my faith is God's testimony to the perfectness of what Christ has done according to the glory of His person. God sets such value upon His work of suffering on the cross, that He can perfectly love me. We are free. We have redemption through His blood. But it is in Him, not only through His blood, but in Him; as it is said in Ephesians 1, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." So that it is of great importance that, while we hold redemption, we should not hold it, if I may be allowed so to say, apart from but in Him. And what will enable me to estimate, and hold fast the preciousness of this work, is His person; we must remember not only what was done, but who He was that did it. If you in self-judgment, cleave to Him and to these two blessed truths in Him, there never can be a cloud upon your soul as to your own perfect deliverance from all charge before God.

But now comes another thought. If Christ has completed this, if it is a past thing, never requiring to be re-touched, we enter upon the second proof of His love "that he might sanctify it, having cleansed [it] by the washing of water by the word." I take it that the sanctifying the Church spoken of here, though

connected closely with its being cleansed through the word, is a distinct thing. These are two operations and there is an important difference between sanctifying the Church and cleansing it. This sanctifying does not merely refer to our growth in grace, it is connected with Christ. It is not the Spirit of God merely working in the believer. Men talk as if it were the business of the Son to justify, and of the Spirit to sanctify. But we are washed, we are sanctified, we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. All that by virtue of which we are washed, and sanctified, and justified, is Christ; and it is by the Spirit of our God. The Spirit of God is the active agent in the justification, no less than in the sanctifying; but it is always by using Christ. Hence there is a great danger in disconnecting Christ from sanctification. Christ gave Himself for the Church, “that he might sanctify and cleanse it.” His blood is involved in His giving Himself, though this is more than that.

In fact, all that which flows into and from redemption, properly so called, is supposed in verse 25: “He loved the church, and gave himself for it.” This is a past thing, followed by that which is going on all the time of the Church’s existence upon the earth. As the fruit of His love comes the death of Christ for us — His giving Himself for the Church. And now you have, founded upon the cross, the sanctifying and cleansing that goes on continually. But how is it wrought? In both cases it is by the washing of water by the word. This shows us the immense importance of the word of God. Of what moment it is for every child of God to value that word and to seek to grow in acquaintance with God through it — to increase in the knowledge of God! So far from our

belonging to the Church, or rather to Christ, being the sum and substance of all we have to learn, it is only the foundation; and it is after we know this, that there follows all the sanctifying and cleansing by the washing of water by the word. So that it is clear we have got three fruits of the love of Christ that are very distinct indeed. The first is, that He gave Himself (that is, unto death); the second is, the present work of His life. Since the cross, He is occupying Himself in heaven about the Church; He is taking care of His members, working by the Holy Ghost, and applying the word of God. And all is connected with Himself, because the whole starting-point is Christ's love to the Church. He is sanctifying and cleansing now by the washing of water by the word; but we know that our sins were put away by His blood.

Before we turn to the third effect of His love, allow me to say here that a fresh application of the blood of Christ is unknown to Christianity. There are Christians, no doubt, who tell you that you must have fresh recourse to the blood; but they have no Scripture for their thought. On the contrary, it weakens the fundamental truth of the efficacy of Christ's own sacrifice, which it is intended, after a human fashion, to commend and exalt. Such is the effect of forming our own thoughts of the use that is to be made of any truth, instead of simply bowing to the word of God. The moment we take a truth out of His connection for us, it is like rooting up that which has its own due place in the garden of God, where it produces its proper, abundant, and precious fruit, but which becomes a withered thing when man takes it into his own hands. Repetition as to this would prove imperfectness. This foundation has been laid so completely in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that it never

requires to be laid again. There is no more the possibility of a fresh sprinkling of Christ's blood, than there is room left for His dying once more to shed His blood. When a soul has found Him and been washed from sin in His blood, there it abides for ever. This is what makes the sin of a Christian to be so serious. If you could begin again, what is the effect? Not very different from that which his confession before a priest has upon the Romanist. People soon learn to trifle with sin, and to get hardened by its deceitfulness. Although it is a different thing where Christ is looked to, still the moral effect is much the same, as far as the making light of sin is concerned. If a person can again and again start afresh, as if a trifle had happened, and begin over and over again for every new downfall, sin is never felt nearly so deeply. For on one side we are bound to bring no stain upon that which is washed in the blood of Christ, yet, on the other, we are conscious of constant failure.

Is there, then, no resource? Is there no renewal of access to the cross? It would be a tremendous thing if there were no provision against our failings and falls, no means of dealing with these departures: but there is a resource, and we have it here — "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." You have similar truth set forth in its individual application to John 13. There it was on the ground that the disciples were His own; that He loved them, and that whom He loved He loved unto the end: and then we find that, being exposed to defile themselves in the world, the Lord would guard them against two things; first, the anxiety lest He should cease to love them because they were unfaithful; secondly, the danger of their using His

faithfulness as a reason for trifling with sin. Christ will never cease to love, nor will He trifle with sin or allow us to trifle with it. He keeps us always resting on His blood. But, then, supposing one is guilty of sin after receiving remission of sins, what is to be done? Let us go and spread it out before God. The veil is not set up again because you have acted foolishly outside it. You are entitled to draw near and spread out your failure before God — to come to Him on the very ground that you are washed in the blood of Christ. What is the effect of this? and what is this the effect of? It is because Christ is sanctifying and cleansing, keeping up the washing of water by the word. There may be this corporate aspect of it, as well as the individual — both are true. It is true for every soul and for the Church at large. Christ is always acting in the presence of God on behalf of the Church; and the consequence is the needed reproof and chastening. A man is brought to feel what he has done. Some word of God, either in his own meditation, or through others, flashes upon his soul. He is convinced of his folly; the will has ceased to act; the word of God is brought home with power by the Holy Ghost; the man bows under it to the Lord.

This is the washing of water by the word. It is the effect of Christ's priesthood at the right hand of God. The application of the word of God to the soul is the effect of the intercession of Christ to put away failure wherever it has been. The work that He is doing at the right hand of God has an intercessional character. A great deal of that which goes on in the soul is not provision for failure, but to guard against failure. God does not count upon sin — He does not look for failure in His child. On the contrary, there is a most solemn injunction against sin. "My little

children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not." He had been telling them, that if any man say he has no sin, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him. Then the effect of that on the corrupt heart of man would be, that some would infer sin to be not so much matter after all. "My little children," he says, "these things write I unto you that ye sin not." We are never free to sin. We are always inexcusable when we do sin. "But," it is added, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." There you have what answers to the Scripture before us. It is not that the position of Christ is the same, but the effect, as far as regards the soul, is similar. Christ is carrying on His blessed action of love, and the effect is that there is that in the word of God which applies itself, by the grace of God, to our fault; so that the sanctifying spoken of here is the practical setting us apart according to our proper calling as God's assembly — the making it good in our souls by the word of God. This is done by the revelation of Christ, and of Christ as He now is in the presence of God. And this is what is referred to in 2 Corinthians 3, where it is said, "We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." We find that the Holy Ghost, revealing Christ as He is glorified now before God, separates us from the world which knows nothing of His glory, but is bent upon its own glory connected with present things. God reveals to us Christ on high, and the effect is that we are weaned from the false glitter of this evil age.

But this being the complete account of what Christ does, there is the cleansing, as well as the sanctifying, the

Church. All defilement requires to be removed; and in both cases it is the washing of water by the word which God uses. But there is a third and future fruit of His love — “that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” There we have clearly the complete blessing of the Church, when there will be no question of cleansing it any more; when all the love of Christ will have its perfect effect, and when the Church will be glorious according to His own likeness, “That he might present the church to himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Thus we have the full, divine account of the love of Christ. But mark, it is not introduced merely in a doctrinal form, but in a most practical way, for the purpose of illustrating the place of the christian husband towards his wife. The husband can only act properly towards his wife when the relationship is regarded on higher ground than a natural one. A Christian must act upon heavenly principles, in order to act well in a natural relationship. You might have a husband attached to his wife, and a wife ever so much attached to him; but if this is their whole ground in married life, it will never have the power, blessing, and honour of God. Though it is all quite right, yet more than this is needed; and the something more that is needed is just the constant reminding of our souls how Christ feels and carries Himself toward the Church. There is always blessing and power in believing the word of God. If not using the word, we shall not have His strength in the natural relationship of this life; yet we ought to have it. If we have it not thus, are we not so far doing without that which would give power, and which God would own and honour?

The Spirit applies it, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.” He is now taking up the common instinct that men naturally avoid pain and take care of themselves. He is speaking only of the fact, and says, Look upon your wife as a part of yourself; and that anything that would wrong her is so much wrong done to your own body. It would teach you affectionate care, “for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:” a beautiful and sweet addition to the truth that was already brought out. All the rest had shown redemption, the present practical cleansing, the future glorification of the Church. But now he adds, that Christ “nourisheth and cherisheth it.” There is the special entrance of His mind, His careful interest in those that belong to Him. It is a great comfort that we know this to be true in the present state of the Church, when we think of the ruin of all around. Does Christ ever cease to nourish that which belongs to Him? Impossible. Spite of all the ruin, He has the same care for His people. We never can pray too much for the Church; but it is another thing to be troubling our minds as if the Lord forgot her, and were not taking adequate care of the saints in their need and sorrow. The Lord has never failed; and what He here tells us to do in our earthly relationship is no more than what He perfectly does towards His Church. He loves the Church; He nourishes and cherishes it, and He does this because “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Just as Eve was a part of Adam, so the Church is of Christ. The Lord took out of Adam’s side that which He built into his wife. So we stand in this nearness of relationship to Christ.

The verse is sometimes applied to Christ's becoming man; but it is the converse of this. It does not mean Christ taking our flesh and bone, but our being made members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. It is our relationship to Christ risen from the dead, and not Christ's relationship to us as a man upon the earth. I only refer to it to guard souls. There is no allusion to our Lord's taking flesh and blood, which we know He did: this is taught in Hebrews, but not here. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. We are really a part of Himself, united to Him as He now is in the presence of God. It is our union to Him, not His incarnation.

The case of Adam is then quoted, and of Eve, in language of allusion to Genesis 2. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband." Thus we have the subject summed up with this practical word. I need not say that everything contrary to the most entire confidence in such a relationship is excluded by this verse. The husband, if acting in the spirit of it, has no secret from the one that is part of himself: but as to the wife, let her see that she reverence or (literally) fear her husband. It would not be the mere familiarity of love, which is wrong in a heavenly point of view. Whatever the confidence of a wife in her husband, it is surely a becoming thing for a wife to fear him. Nor is this the least incompatible with love. We are told to hold fast grace; and what is the effect? That we may serve God

acceptably with reverence and godly fear. There is an immense difference, of course, between God and man; but it may serve to illustrate. Here it is the fear that dreads to offend, and seeks earnestly the husband's honour. This holds true in every case. Supposing you take the case of a stupid husband who has a clever wife; if he shows what he is from day to day, so much the more has the wife to guard her own spirit, that she should use what she has for her husband without seeming to do so. And now comes in the very important thing, that in these circumstances she should honour God and her husband, instead of a word to himself or to others that would wound or show a want of care. It is in such circumstances that the wisdom and spiritual feeling of a godly woman should shine, and shine by not shining: for the blessing of the married pair supposes that the man should appear and not the woman. Where the heart is simply looking to the Lord, there would be this result: and although it might look unseemly that such should be linked together and it would make their path more difficult, still there is nothing impossible to God. And if the christian woman sought the mind of God, honouring Him in the circumstances, God would use her in a very blessed and happy way for the helping of her husband, and for the covering of that which would be mortifying to him. But the principle always abides. As nothing justifies a husband in not loving his wife, so nothing justifies a wife in not reverencing her husband. The Lord grant that we may bear in mind His holy and gracious admonition.

Ephesians 6

Let us briefly look at the relations of children and fathers, as well as of servants and masters. Here, obedience is the grand point pressed on the inferior in each case. As all saints are called to submit themselves one to another in the fear of Christ, and wives especially to their own husbands, subject to them in every thing, so children are to obey their parents in the Lord. (Ver. 1.) It is not that the Holy Ghost has not a suited and a serious word for their fathers; but, in general, how easy is the flow of a christian household where the young obey — above all, where they “obey in the Lord.” Natural affection is sweet, and the lack of it is a sign of the perilous last days; but it is not enough; nor is conscience, all-important as it is in its place, an adequate guard, nor can it be a spring of power; but the Lord is. And how blessed, where duty is clothed with and absorbed in Him! This, and nothing less than this, is pressed by the Holy Ghost.

It was so with the Lord Himself when He was here, and knew what it was to be in the place of a child. “And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.” Nor are we left to a vague, general statement; we are shown a living picture of His ways. “And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk

and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Thus, He, even as a child of twelve, had the consciousness of His own proper relationship. The. humanity He had taken, as born of a woman, in no way weakened the sense He had of His Father's love and business, but rather gave a new occasion in which He had to make it good. At the same time, we see what is so beautiful — how His eye, absolutely single, saw that which became Him on the earthly side, in striking contrast with Joseph and even His mother, who "understood not the saying which he spake unto them." Hence we read immediately after that, "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." Such was Jesus, the Lord of all, during much the larger part of His earthly career.

The same principle is true of the christian child; save that Christ's relationship to the Father was essential, ours to Him and to His Father is, of course, the pure gift of grace. But still we, too, are children, conferred on us as the title surely is in and through our Lord Jesus. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..... Beloved, now are we the sons of God." And this, by the

working of the Holy Ghost, is the secret of happy obedience in the earthly relationship. Conscious of what we are to the Lord, we can obey in Him. “In the Lord” is both the encouragement, the safeguard, and the limit. The parents might be Jew or heathen, or they might bear unworthily the name of Christ; but christian children (while thoroughly owning their relation to their parents, whatever they might be) have the sweet privilege of obeying “in the Lord.” How it simplifies questions otherwise perplexing! How it determines also where and how far one ought to go! For if they are to obey “in the Lord,” such a call cannot rightly be made a reason or excuse for sin.

In the Epistle to the Colossians, where the saints were in danger from a misuse of legal ordinances, the ground urged why children should obey their parents in all things, is “For this is well-pleasing unto the Lord.” Here the faithful were free from that snare, and the Holy Ghost could freely use a principle embodied in the law, and hence adds “for this is right,” or just. Nay, He can follow it up with a quotation, slightly changed from the decalogue, drawing attention parenthetically to its special place therein. “Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest be long-lived on the earth.” (Ver. 2, 3.) If such was God’s estimate of filial piety under law, was it less now that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ unfolds His nature and calls us to the relationship of sons unto Himself? If respect to that word of old found its approval and recompense in the righteous government of God, if He then watched over and prospered such as honoured their parents, did the revelation of Himself in grace relax the obligation

for His children, or make the love that prompts and sustains such honour less precious in His own eyes now? No intelligent Christian would contend that it is other than a precept from the law, but so applied as to insinuate, if I mistake not, a kind of à fortiori conclusion to the New Testament believer. Certainly, to be well and live long on the earth is not the form in which the proper portion of a saint, since the cross of Christ) is usually set before him.

To the fathers is the admonition (more needed by such than the mothers, perhaps, though in principle no doubt intended for both), “Provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Ver. 4.) What knowledge of the heart of both old and young! What tender consideration, after the pressure of obedience, lest a too stringent and capricious use of the parental authority might exasperate! The bringing them up, or nourishing, is, on the other hand, to be with the Lord’s discipline and admonition. As the Christian knows His ways, as they are in exercise toward himself and others, so is he to train up his children for Him — an all-important principle for the parent’s own heart and conscience. Do we desire the Lord alone for them, or the world too?

Next (ver. 5-8), the christian slaves are exhorted to obey their masters according to the flesh (such they were, whether converted or not), to obey them with fear and trembling, in singleness of their heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, with goodwill doing service as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each doeth, this he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. Is it not worthy of

all note the extent and depth of the liberty that is in Christ? There is nothing violent or revolutionary; and yet the change is complete, absolute, final in its principle and character, though one has to grow in the appreciation and manifestation of it. And this growth is important morally, being part and parcel of Christianity practically viewed, where the very first blessing which God's grace bestows upon us in Christ appears not save to faith, has to be realized all through in the power of the Spirit through self-judgment, and is only ours in actual possession and display when that which is perfect is come in resurrection-glory. Still, how blessed, that if in one sense we have nothing, in another and just as real a sense we possess all things. On this truth faith has to lay hold and act; and among the rest, what a boon to the christian bondman! What a mighty motive for him, who, already consciously free in Christ in a liberty entirely superior to circumstances, has for that very reason such a scope for triumphing over his fetters and serving Christ in obeying the worst of masters if it were the Lord's will so to try him! Doubtless, the master too has his duties; but if he fail, what then? Is the slave absolved from his responsibility? How can this ever be a difficulty, if he obeys in simplicity as unto Christ? Does He fail? What a deliverance from every shade of dishonesty! — "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ [how honourable the title which one shares with an apostle!], doing the will of God from the soul;" for such is the true word here. More than this: not only is there the call with goodwill to do service as to the Lord and not to men, but they are reminded that the day was coming when each, whether bond or free, should receive of the Lord for whatever good he might do. Ample wages then, be assured; for He, at least, is not unrighteous.

Then, in turn (ver. 9), the masters are called to impartial equity, doing as they would be done by, and abstaining from the threats so natural toward a poor slave. They were to know that the Lord both of masters and slaves was in the heavens, and that no respect of persons is with Him: — both of them weighty considerations for a master, and, with delicate propriety, laid before him rather than the slave.

We now enter on the final exhortations of the epistle, no longer occupied with the several relationships of the saints in their earthly circumstances, and hence looking at distinct classes, but addressed to all. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” It is the opening of the solemn subject of proper christian conflict, viewed, naturally in Ephesians, as carried on at the height of our heavenly privileges in Christ. In 1 Peter the scene lies, so to speak, in the wilderness, where, most appropriately, sobriety and vigilance are enjoined on the pilgrims and strangers who pass onward to the incorruptible inheritance; because their adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour. Here the enemy is regarded as on high, where the saints are blessed with every spiritual blessing, where their Head is exalted, where they are seated in Him, where the principalities and powers are learning by them the manifold wisdom of God; there, too, is the real struggle with the prince of the power of the air and his hosts.

But if, on the one hand, there is no keeping back from the believers the formidable conflict to which they are inevitably committed, there is, on the other hand, no weakening of their hands. On the contrary, the trumpet, which here summons to the battle, gives the most

certain sounds of good courage, without presumption, in the saints, and of the amplest provision for their victory in the Lord, who has called them to warfare at His charges. What was His name by faith in His name to him that was lame from his mother's womb, whom they laid for daily alms at the gate of the temple? Is it less for our need? Far be the thought. All that is needed is the faith which is by Him; and faith comes by a report and this by God's word; and what more inspiriting to us than such words as these, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might?"

Nevertheless, the mighty contest with the powers of darkness admits of no negligence on our part. We cannot afford to be unguarded anywhere. We have to stand, not so much against the strength of the devil (Christ did this) as against his wiles. In truth, he is to us a vanquished foe in the cross; and we are entitled always to treat him as such. Therefore, says James, (James 4:7), "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." It is his artifices that are chiefly and always to be dreaded; and to resist these we need to put on the panoply of God, as it is added here: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places."

Well might we tremble if we stood in any resources of ours against such an array. But it is not so. The battle is the Lord's and our exposure but draws out His mighty hand and unfailing wisdom. Still we have to fight. It will not do to plead our weakness or His strength in order to shirk our responsibility. We must not merely look at, or

point to, the panoply of God as our possession, so to speak, but must put it on at His bidding.

Another thing must be borne in mind. It is no question here of our wants before God. For He has no conflict with us; but having delivered our souls, He calls us to wrestle for the mastery with the unseen armies of His enemy. As naked in our lost estate once, we needed to be clothed; and His grace did clothe us with the best robe, with Christ. This is our clothing as before God: nothing less, nothing else, would suit His presence as His guests. But here it is a question of fighting the enemy, after we are clad with Christ; and we needed armour of divine tempering to stand aright and securely. On the details of this armour we shall enter by and by; it is only on the general truth that I would insist now.

How remarkably we are here reminded of Joshua in verse 10, and Israel's foes in verse 12! To Joshua the word was, "Arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses..... There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous." (Joshua 1. Compare also verses 9, 18.) Again, it is clear that if the Canaanites were but enemies of flesh and blood, they are types of the still deadlier foes we have to fight — foes whose effort it is to hinder the Christian from

taking possession, in present enjoyment, of his heavenly inheritance.

It is not here, note it well, the Red Sea crossed, and then the desert, where we have to learn what God is and to be proved ourselves. The wilderness is the great scene of temptation; though, no doubt, there are occasional battles, as with Amalek and with Midian, still it is the place where we have to go or stay at God's bidding, in need of daily, heaven-sent supplies, where there is nothing else to sustain, ever marching onward with the heavenly land before us. But the wrestling here, as in the Book of Joshua, supposes the passage of the Jordan and entrance into Canaan, where the day of conflict begins, rather than that of temptation in the wilderness.

Is the evangelical school right in making Jordan to be the act of death at the end of our career when the saint departs to be with Christ? Clearly not; for in this case what would answer to the wars in Canaan? No! excellent as Bunyan was, in this he was mistaken, following the mistakes of others before him and perpetuating them far and wide to this day. Indeed, this is one of the tests of where the soul is and how far it is emancipated from traditional theology, which limits its disciples to a minimum of truth. Elsewhere, as for instance in their use of the Passover and Red Sea, there is defectiveness; here there is absolutely nothing, or error. And this I say, singling out the author of "Pilgrim's Progress" as a noble and most advanced specimen of popular views. The best of their day in the religious world are but his commentators — some of them literally so. Can there be a better proof how completely the gist of this epistle is ignored? The truth is that in the Red Sea we have Christ dead and risen for us; in Jordan, we have our death and

resurrection with Him: the one ushering us into the world as the dreary waste of our pilgrimage, the other putting us in view of our heavenly blessing, which we have then to appropriate by victory over Satan. The distinction is as clear as it is important, though both are true of the Christian now. When the glorious day comes for the inheritance to be ours, not by the force of faith which thus in practice defeats the enemy and makes good the land God has given us, we shall not have to wrestle with these principalities and powers in heavenly places: the conflict will be closed for us and for ever. The expulsion of the dragon, “that old serpent,” is not our work, but that of Michael and his angels. With overcoming him we have to do, but not with his forcible ejection from heaven. All the time the Church is here below, our conflict goes on with these spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places; when the actual casting out by God’s providential power takes place, we shall not be here, but above.

After the Passover and the Red Sea there was no return of Israel to the slavery of Pharaoh; their taskmasters were overthrown and gone; “there remained not so much as one of them.” “The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptian, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.” But circumcision did not characterize the redeemed in the wilderness. No sooner were the children on the Canaanitish side of Jordan than they rolled away the reproach of Egypt at Gilgal. The knife of circumcision was applied to deal with Israel before they draw the sword on the doomed inhabitants of Canaan. They were in Canaan and had nothing more to do to get there: their work was to make the land their own.

Has this no instruction for us? Have we consciously laid hold of our union with Christ on high? Do we know our place is there in Him, and that we have there to stand? Is nature, root and branch, a judged thing in us? Do we render a heavenly testimony — not only righteous and holy, but heavenly? Are we then and thus advancing on the enemy and making good our title by present victory to enjoy the boundless blessings above which we have in Christ? Or are we still, as far as realization goes, ransomed, but in the wilderness, with Jordan uncrossed and the old corn of the land for us untouched food? Are we merely guarding against the flesh breaking out here or there, against worldly temptations overtaking us in this or that? If so, need we wonder that verse 12 sounds mysterious, and that we question what is meant by the wrestling with the enemies in heavenly places? It was probably the total misapprehension, or non-apprehension, of the truth here revealed, which led our English translators into the unwarrantable change of heavenly into “high” places in this passage only. It behoves ourselves, however, to consider whether our own souls have proved and are proving the panoply of God in this conflict, where, above all, it is plain that “the flesh profiteth nothing.”

In these verses, after a prefatory resumption, we come to the particulars of the Christian’s armour. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,” etc. (Ver. 13-17.)

The first thing to be noticed is that the Holy Spirit calls on us to take up the panoply of God. Neither strength nor wisdom of man avail in this conflict. As we have to

do with the hosts of Satan on the one hand, we need on the other “the whole armour of God.” Our natural character and habits may not signify, where the Spirit of God is at work to save our souls in His grace; but they are of vast moment in presence of a foe who knows how to take advantage of every unguarded opening. Even to those at Corinth, carnal as they were, and only fit to bear the food of babes (not the solid meat which is set before the Ephesian saints), he had shown that, walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but divinely mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Not flesh, but the Spirit of God has power against Satan.

Here, too, the character of the time in which the conflict goes on is designated as “the evil-day.” Evil indeed is the entire period since Christ was crucified and the enemy acquired the title of “the prince of this world.” Hence, in chapter 5, we are expected to walk with carefulness, not as fools but as wise, seizing every good and suited opportunity, because “the days are evil.” But here we have something more precise, “that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.” For there are occasions when the power of evil is allowed to press more closely and the danger is great for the careless soul. It is emphatically then “the evil day;” and it is well when the Christian has anticipated it; for the point at such a time is not to take up the panoply, but, having already taken it, “to withstand.” “The evil day” should find us already and fully armed, if we are to make effectual resistance. Nor is this enough. For how often the victory of faith is

too great for the faith that won it, and a saint who has long and afresh vanquished the enemy, may tire of the struggle and turn aside into a seemingly easier path, to prove his own folly, and his exceeding danger, even if in the end delivered by the pure mercy of God! To resist, then, does not suffice, but “having done all,” having thoroughly accomplished all things requisite, “to stand.” The fight — the fights — may have been keen, the victory complete through the Lord’s goodness and might; but the war is not over. Our place is still to stand our ground.

“Stand, therefore, having girt your loins about with truth, and put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” I have changed the English Version slightly, so as to adhere more closely to the true sense, which supposes not only a settled position, but the soul in activity according to the summons of the Holy Ghost. Much mischief has arisen from regarding this passage as if it treated of standing, whereas, in truth, it is essentially different. It is practical arming and conflict, founded on the most blessed standing anywhere revealed in the New Testament, and suitably closing the epistle which reveals it.

To know the truth and be set free by the truth is one thing; to have girt about our loins with truth is another. It is the intimate dealing of truth with the soul, so that there is no laxity of heart or indulged will, but, on the contrary, the affections and judgment braced up to Christ and the things of Christ. Thus the saint cleaves to the Lord with full purpose of heart; and, self being searched and judged by the truth, there is vigour imparted through the revelation of His mind and grace,

which are now more than ever enjoyed. It is the power of truth in keeping the soul, delivered in God's rich mercy, and too thankful to be under an authority so comprehensive and penetrating and absolute, as to leave nothing, let it be ever so inward, outside the range of God's will and the saint's obedience. To bear and delight in this, however, assumes that the heart is established in grace; it can then welcome the truth in all its energetic claim and control.

Next follows "the breastplate of righteousness" put on. This is quite distinct from the righteousness of God, which we are made in Christ. The latter we need before God; the former we want for successful wrestling with our adversary the devil. As the Spirit, in the girding round our loins with truth, shows the first piece of armour to be the thorough application of the word to us in self-judgment, and, withal, in moral energy, so the next demanded is that we put on practical righteousness as our breastplate. Nothing exposes a saint in conflict more readily than a bad conscience in his ways. I do not mean a conscience unpurged, but where evil, after the knowledge of redemption, has been allowed and communion is broken.

Connected with this is the having "the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." This, again, is evidently a matter of practical power and enjoyment, the effect of maintaining a good conscience, as the latter can only be where all is held and guarded by the truth. Then the soul goes on in peace. "The fruit of righteousness," as another apostle says, "is sown in peace of them that make peace." Where there is laxity, the conscience gets bad; and the result is trouble, and making trouble; where truth governs, the conscience is

kept bright, and, happy ourselves, we shed happiness around us.

Verse 16 introduces another and quite as necessary a part of the divine armour, but, doubtless, justly put subsequent to what we have seen. “Above [or, beside] all, having taken up the shield of faith with which ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” This means that confidence in God Himself which the soul is entitled and encouraged to cherish: I say, in Himself, because, though inseparable from the godly and righteous state the previous portions of the panoply intimate, it is a confidence springing only from what God is known to be in His own nature and character. All the envenomed efforts of the wicked one are futile where God is thus known in the power of the Holy Ghost ungrieved within us; all his darts not only fail to produce despair and distrust, but they are extinguished by the shield of faith.

But there is more (ver. 17): “and receive the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.” The shield of faith is more general confidence; the helmet of salvation is rather the bold and joyful consciousness of the full deliverance God has wrought for us in Christ. This crowns the various parts of the armour already noticed, and is therefore followed, not by further means of defence (for it is complete), but by the instrument of offensive energy against the adversary, the sword of the Spirit, even God’s word. How wisely it is thus placed in the last place of all, will be apparent to the instructed mind! Indeed, if there be not this order known practically, the word is made a mere toy of, or perhaps a scourge for self, rather than to have the character of the sword of the Spirit; it is misused and

powerless. Handled in the Spirit, what deliverance it works! What disabling of adversaries and what a detector of Satan! It is for conflict.

We have had the details of the panoply of God, active energy following that which pertains to the state, practical security and the confidence of the soul. But there is a hidden spring of power without which nothing avails — the expression of weakness, strange to say, but of weakness in dependence on God. Hence the word is, "praying always with all prayer" — praying at every season. There is nothing the enemy more dreads, nothing that flesh more seeks to hinder, or to make amiss if there be the form. But so much the more need we to bear in mind the call to habitual and complete dependence.

Besides, there is the exercise of spiritual desires, and not dependence only; as it is said by our Lord elsewhere, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 14, 15) In a word, there is encouragement and exhortation to every kind of prayer and at every opportunity, while there is also that character of petition which is sustained in the power of the Holy Ghost, "supplication in the Spirit," which all prayer of the saints is not.

Another weighty word is the call to "watch unto this very thing;" for this supposes the activity of love which is quick to discern in the fear of the Lord and in the bowels of Christ that which might tarnish His glory on the one hand, and on the other whatever would

contribute to the exaltation of His name in His saints and testimony. What a deliverance this is, not only from self-will, but from anxiety and from self-importance! And what a field for gracious affections to turn everything of good or ill into occasions of intercourse with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to turn all — otherwise transient, or food for gossip — into channels of everlasting blessing! How wise and good is every word of our God! May the thing itself, as well as His word about it, be precious in our eyes! Where this is so, there will be watching in the habit of prayer, “with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” For where God’s presence is thus realized, there is no straitness in the affections, but love goes out energetically to Him and in communion with Him concerning all the saints. It is the service of love before Him who is love. But as having at heart the interests of Christ, there is the special remembrance of such as gather with Christ. So here the apostle speaks of their supplication on behalf of himself; and, as it appears, with a link of greater energy than that which spread desires about the saints before the Lord — “and for me” (not merely περὶ, but ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, as indicating particularity among the general objects of the action), “that utterance may be given unto me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, on behalf of which I am ambassador in chains; that therein I may be bold as I ought to speak.”

It is blessed to find such a practical evidence of the apostle’s own sense of the value of intercession, the intercession of saints, for his ministry. His consciousness of its dignity rather increased than diminished his wish to be thus remembered.

But again, he reckoned on their love, not only in thus praying on his behalf, but also in their desiring to know matters concerning him, how he fared; and, therefore tells them that “Tychicus, the beloved brother, and faithful servant in the Lord’ shall make known to you all things: whom I sent unto you for this very purpose, that ye may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts.” What a contrast with the spirit of men is the mighty, gracious working of divine love in the heart, which counts on the tender concern of the saints in him who served and loved them in the Lord! Man, as such, would either be indifferent and hard, or would fear the imputation of vanity, as if his matters could be objects of interest to others. But Christ changes all for the hearts of those that have received Him.

“Peace to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption.”